

# Repetition

An Essay in Experimental Psychology

By

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On wild trees the flowers are fragrant, on cultivated trees, the fruits.  
(Flavius Philostratus the Elder, *Heroicus*)\*

WHEN the Eleatics\* denied motion, Diogenes, as everyone knows, [9] came forward in protest, actually came forward, because he did not say a word, but simply walked back and forth a few times, with which gesture he believed he had sufficiently refuted the Eleatic position. When I had been preoccupied for some time, at least when I had the opportunity, with the problem of whether repetition was possible and what it mean, whether a thing wins or loses by being repeated, it suddenly occurred to me: you can go to Berlin, since you were there once before, you could in this way learn whether repetition was possible and what it meant. I had come to a standstill in my attempts to resolve this problem at home. Say what you will, this problem is going to play an important role in modern philosophy because *repetition* is a decisive expression for what '*recollection*' was for the Greeks. Just as they taught that all knowledge is recollection, thus will modern philosophy teach that life itself is a repetition. The only modern philosopher who has had the least intimation of this is Leibniz.\* Repetition and recollection are the same movement, just in opposite directions, because what is recollected has already been and is thus repeated backwards, whereas genuine repetition is recollected forwards. Repetition, if it is possible, thus makes a person happy, while recollection makes him unhappy, assuming, of course, that he actually gives himself time to live and does not, immediately upon the hour of his birth hit upon an excuse, such as that he has forgotten something, to sneak back out of life again.

Recollection's love is the only happy love, according to one author.\* He is absolutely right about this if one also remembers that it first makes a person unhappy. Repetition's love is in truth the only happy love. Like recollection, it is not disturbed by hope nor by the marvellous anxiety of discovery, neither, however, doesn't have the sorrow of recollection. It has instead the blissful security [10] of the moment. Hope is new attire, stiff and starched and splendid. Still, since it has not yet been tried on, one does not know whether it will suit one, or whether it will fit. Recollection is discarded clothing which, however lovely it might be, no longer suits one because one has outgrown it. Repetition is clothing that never becomes worn, that fits snugly and comfortably, that neither pulls nor hangs too loosely. Hope is a pretty girl, who slips away from one's grasp.

Recollection is a beautiful older woman who never quite suits the moment. Repetition is a beloved wife of whom one never tires because it is only the new of which one tires. One never tires of the old, and when one has it before oneself one is happy, and only a person who does not delude himself that repetition ought to be something new, for then he tires of it, is genuinely happy. It requires youthfulness to hope and youthfulness to recollect, but it requires courage to will repetition. He who will only hope is cowardly. He who wants only to recollect is a voluptuary. But he who wills repetition, he is a man, and the more emphatically he has endeavoured to understand what this means, the deeper he is as a human being. But he who does not grasp that life is repetition and that this is the beauty of life, has condemned himself and deserves nothing better than what will happen to him — death. Hope is an enticing fruit that fails to satisfy, recollection sorrowful sustenance that fails to satisfy. But repetition is the daily bread that satisfies through blessing. When one has circumnavigated existence, then it will become apparent whether one has the courage to understand that life is repetition and the desire to look forward to this. He who has not circumnavigated life before he has begun to live will never really live. He who circumnavigated life but became sated has a poor constitution. He who chooses repetition, he lives. He does not chase after butterflies like a child, or stand on tiptoe in order to glimpse the wonders of the world. He knows them. Neither does he sit like an old woman and spin on the spinning wheel of recollection. He goes calmly about his life, happy in repetition. What would life be without repetition? Who would want to be a tablet on which life wrote something new every moment, or a memorial to something past? Who would want to be moved by the fleeting, the new, that is always effeminately diverting the soul?

[11] If God Himself had not willed repetition, there would never have been a world. He would either have followed the easy plans of hope, or recalled everything and preserved it in recollection. He did not do this. This is the reason there is a world. The world consists of repetition. Repetition is actuality and the earnestness of existence. He who wills repetition is genuinely mature. This is my *Separat-Votum*,<sup>1</sup> that means in addition that life's earnestness is in no way to sit on the sofa and pick one's teeth — to be something such as, for example,

<sup>1</sup> Private opinion.

a titular counsellor, or to have a dignified walk—and be somebody such as His Reverence, just as little as it is life's earnestness to be the royal riding-master. Such things are in my eyes only jokes, and as such, sometimes bad jokes.

Recollection's love is the only happy love, according to an author who, to the best of my knowledge, is sometimes deceitful, not in such a way, however, that he says one thing and thinks something else, but in that he develops a thought to such an extreme that if it is not grasped with the same energy, it will appear in the next moment to be something else. This claim is presented by him in such a way that one is easily tempted to agree and thus to forget that the claim itself is an expression of the deepest melancholy. Such profound melancholy, condensed in a single remark, could not easily find better expression.

It was about a year ago that I began to take serious notice of a young person with whom I had heretofore often had contact because there was something enticing in his attractive appearance and the determined look in his eye. The way he tossed his head, a certain flippancy in his expressions, convinced me that he was a deep person with many levels to his character, while a certain hesitancy in his tone suggested that he was of that seductive age when the spirit declares its maturity, just as the body does at a much earlier age, by a frequent breaking of the voice. I had, with the help of casual coffee-house acquaintances, already become close to him and persuaded him to see in me a confidant whose talk in many ways succeeded in drawing from him, through occasional convulsions, his melancholy, just as Farinelli\* coaxed the miserable king out of his dark hold, which because my friend was still young and malleable was possible to do without the use of pliers. Such was our relationship, when about a year ago, as I said, he came to me quite beside himself. His appearance was more dramatic than usual, his form more beautiful, his large, luminous eyes were dilated. In short, he appeared [12] transfigured. When he informed me that he was in love, I could not help but think that to be loved in this way would make any girl happy. He had been in love for a while, he explained, but had concealed this from me. Now the object of his passion was within reach. He had confessed his love and found it reciprocated. Despite the fact that I ordinarily have a tendency to relate to other people merely as an observer, it was impossible for me to do this with him. Say what

you will, a love-struck young person is such a beautiful sight that one cannot help but rejoice in it and thus forget to observe. Deep emotions always disarm the observer in a person. The desire to observe comes only when there is an emptiness in the place of emotion, or when emotions are coquettishly concealed. Who could be so inhuman as to wish to observe a person who prayed genuinely with his whole soul? Who would not rather feel permeated by the flood of the worshipper's devotion? When, on the other hand, one hears a priest recite a well-rehearsed sermon in which he repeatedly attests, independently of any demand on the part of the congregation, in an artificially worked, even preposterously overworked, passage, that he expresses a simple faith that knows nothing of flowery speech, but which gives him through prayer what, according to his own words and presumably for good reasons, he sought vainly in poetry, art, and scholarship, then one calmly places the microscope before one's eye, then one does not allow oneself simply to swallow what was said, but pulls the blinds and produces the critical apparatus that tests every sound and every word.

The young person I speak of was deeply, passionately, beautifully, and self-effacingly in love. It had been a long time since I had been so happy as I was when I looked at him, because it is often sad to be an observer. It can be depressing in the same way that it can be depressing to be a police officer, and when an observer genuinely follows his calling he must be regarded as a police informant who is serving a higher purpose because the art of observation is to bring forth what is hidden. The young person talked about the girl he loved. He used few words. His description was no vapid assessment, as the speeches of lovers very often are. He exhibited no affectation that would suggest he felt he was a shrewd fellow for having captured such a girl, no arrogance—his love was wholesome and pure and uncorrupted. He confided to me, with an endearing candour, that the reason he

[13] had come to me was that he needed a confidant in whose presence he could talk to himself out loud, as well as that he feared he might otherwise spend the whole day with the girl and thus become a nuisance to her. He had already set off for her house many times, but forced himself to turn around. He asked me now if I would go for a ride with him to help divert his thoughts from her and to pass the time. I was more than willing, because from the moment he had confided in me he could rest assured that I would be of unconditional

service to him. I used the half-hour while we waited for the carriage to take care of some business correspondence. I suggested he fill his pipe, or flip through some of the magazines that were lying about. He didn't need to do anything, however, to fill the time. He was so preoccupied with his own thoughts that he could not even remain seated, but paced back and forth. His gait, his movements, his gestures were all eloquent. He glowed with love. Just as a grape becomes bright and transparent as it ripens, the juice flowing through the fine veins, just as the skin bursts when it reaches the peak of ripeness, so did love break almost visibly forth from him. I could not help occasionally stealing a glance over at him, because such a youth is as seductive a sight as a young girl.

Just as lovers often seek refuge in the words of poets in order to allow the sweet anxiety of love a joyous expression, this was also the case with him. He repeated again and again as he paced back and forth a poem by Poul Møller:\*

There comes a dream from the spring of my youth  
To my old easy chair  
I feel a passionate longing for you  
My queen with the golden hair.\*

His eyes filled with tears and he threw himself down in a chair. He repeated the verse again and again. This scene made a deep and moving impression on me. God in heaven, I thought, I have never before seen such melancholy. I had known he tended toward melancholy, but that to be in love could have such an effect on him! And yet are not most admittedly abnormal emotional conditions consistent in this way when they are generally present? People are always crying that a depressive should try to fall in love, because if he does, he will forget about everything else. To the extent that he really is a depressive, how could he possibly avoid a melancholy preoccupation with what was now the most important thing in the world to him? He was deeply and passionately in love, this was clear, and yet he was already, in the earliest days, in a position to recollect his love. He was basically finished with the whole relationship. Simply by having begun, he advanced such a terrific distance that he had leapt right over life. It would make no great difference if the girl died tomorrow. He would still throw himself into his love. His eyes would still fill with tears and he would continue to repeat the words of the poet. [14]

What a strange dialectic! He longs for the girl, and is forced to do himself violence in order to avoid spending his entire day with her, and yet from the first moment, he became an old man with respect to the whole relationship. There must be some kind of fundamental misunderstanding. Nothing had moved me for a long time so strongly as this scene. It was clear he would become unhappy, and no less clear that the girl would as well, even though it was not possible at this point to predict precisely how this was going to happen. This much, however, is clear: if anyone can speak about the love of recollection, he can. The great advantage of recollection is that it begins with loss. This is its security—it has nothing to lose.

The carriage arrived. We drove up Strandveien,\* with the intention of later looking for an actual wooded area. Since, against my own will, I had adopted the position of an observer relative to him, I could not resist trying all kinds of tricks, as sailors say, to log the momentum of his depression. I evoked all possible erotic moods—no result. I searched in vain for any effect the change of surroundings might have. Neither the vast energy of the ocean, nor the lulling stillness of the forest, nor the beckoning solitude of evening could relieve him of the melancholy longing, through which he did not so much bring his beloved closer as remove himself from her even more. His mistake was fatal. His mistake was that he stood at the end rather than at the beginning, but such a mistake is always a person's ruin.

I believe, however, that his mood was an appropriately erotic mood, and that anyone who has not experienced it at the beginning of a love has never loved. It is simply that he needs another mood alongside this one. This intensified recollection is the eternal expression for the beginning of romantic love, is a sign of genuine romantic love. An ironic elasticity is also required, however, in order for it to  
 [15] be of use. This he lacked, his soul was too delicate. It may be true that in the first instant one's life is over, but one must also have the strength to do away with this death, to transform it into life. At the dawn of love, the present and the future battle for eternal expression. This recollection is precisely the reflux of eternity into the present, when, in any case, it is healthy recollection.

We returned home. I left him, but my sympathy had been almost too strongly set in motion. I could not rid myself of the thought that there would soon be a terrible explosion.



I saw him now and then during the next couple of weeks. He had himself begun to grasp the problem; the young girl he desired had already become almost an annoyance. And yet she was his beloved, the only one he had ever loved, the only one he would ever love. On the other hand, he did not really love her, but only longed for her. All this was accompanied by a strange change in him. A poetic productivity awakened in him, to an extent that I would not have thought possible. Now I understood everything. The young girl was not his beloved, she was simply the cause that awakened the poetic in him and thus transformed him into a poet. This was why he could love only her, never forget her, never wish to love anyone else, and yet still merely long for her. She had permeated every aspect of his being. The thought of her was always fresh. She had been important for him. She had made him into a poet, and with this signed her own death-sentence.

As time passed, his relationship became an increasing torment. His depression came more and more to have the upper hand, and his physical strength was consumed by emotional battles. He could see that he had made her unhappy, and yet he was not conscious of having done anything wrong. But precisely this, through no fault of his own, to become guilty of having made her unhappy, offended him and set his passion in violent motion. Yet to confess to her how things stood would, he feared, injure her profoundly. It would be as if to say that she had somehow become less perfect, that he had outgrown her, that he no longer needed the stairs by which he had ascended to his present height. What would happen as a result? She would know that he would never love anyone else, thus she would become his grieving widow who lived only in her memories of him and their relationship. He could make no confession; he valued her too highly for that. His depression increased and he decided to continue with the deception. All his poetic talents were now used to amuse and entertain her. What could have provided amusement for many was used exclusively on her. She was and remained the beloved, the adored, even though he was near to losing his mind as a result of the lie that served only to enthrall her more and more profoundly. Her existence or non-existence, in a certain sense, actually meant nothing to him, though his depression found joy only through bringing enchantment to her life. It goes without saying that she was happy, because she suspected nothing and was being sustained [16]

by what was all too delicious. He did not want to be productive in a more genuine sense, for this would have required leaving her. Thus, as he said, he kept his productivity continually pruned in order to produce bouquets for her from the cuttings. She suspected nothing. I believe this. It would be disturbing, in any case, to think that a young girl could be so vain as to be flattered by a person's depression. Such things do happen, however, and I was once very close to discovering such a relationship. There is nothing so seductive to a girl as to be loved by a poetic-depressive type. And if she is vain enough to deceive herself into thinking that she loves him faithfully by clinging to him instead of giving him up, then her task in life will be easy. She will enjoy both the distinction and the good conscience of being faithful, and at the same time the most finely distilled romantic love. God save everyone from such faithfulness!

His dark passions had completely gained the upper hand when he came up to me one day. He vehemently cursed existence, his love, and his beloved. He never came to me again after that. He apparently could not forgive himself for having confessed to another person that the girl had become a torment to him. He had ruined everything, even the joy he had taken in preserving her pride, in transforming her into a goddess. He avoided me when our paths crossed. If we ran into each other he would not talk to me, but made obvious efforts to [17] appear happy and confident. I was prepared to pursue him a little more closely, and to this end I had begun to make enquiries among the more subordinate of his acquaintances. One learns most about depressives, I have discovered, through such people. Depressives often open up more to a domestic, a footman or a maidservant, an old and overlooked family fixture, than to someone to whom he is connected more closely by education and social circumstances. I knew a depressive who danced through life, and deceived everyone, including myself, until a barber put me on the right track. The barber was an older man who lived in straitened circumstances and who thus took care of his customers himself. Sympathy with the barber's plight caused the man to reveal his depression; thus this barber knew what no one else knew.

The young person spared me the effort of tracking him down, however, because he came to me himself, though this time determined never to set foot inside my door again. He suggested we arrange to meet at mutually agreed-upon times at certain out-of-the-way places.

I was willing to do this and purchased, for this purpose, two tokens to fish in Stadsgraven.\* This is where we met in the early morning, in that hour when the day battles with the night, when even during the summer a cold chill runs through nature. We met down there in the clammy morning mist when the grass was still wet with dew and the birds took off in fright at his cries. In the hour when day has finally won, when everything that lives again rejoices in existence, in the hour when the beloved young girl, whom he had adorned with his pain, lifted her head from its pillow and opened her eyes because the god of sleep, who had sat by her bedside, rose again, in the hour when the god of dreams placed his fingers on her eyelids so that she slipped briefly back to sleep while he told her of things she had never suspected, but whispered them so softly that she forgot them all when she woke up, in this hour, we parted. And whatever the god of dreams might have said to her, she could not have dreamed what transpired between us. It is no wonder he was pale and no wonder that I, who was his confidant and the confidant of many others like him, am also pale.

More time passed. I suffered a great deal for the young person who wasted away day by day. And yet I in no way regretted sharing in his suffering, because through his love the idea had been set in motion. (And such a love, God be praised, one sees sometimes in life, though one would search vainly for it in literature.) Only where this [18] is the case does romantic love have any meaning, and he who is not enthusiastically convinced that the idea is the life-principle of love, and that when it is demanded he must give his life for it, and what is more, must sacrifice love itself, he is excluded from poetry. Even though his situation is ripe with poetic possibilities, he is excluded from poetry. On the other hand, where romantic love is present as an idea, every movement, every feeling, even a fleeting one, has meaning because the main point is always there, the poetic collision which can, according to what I know, be even more horrific than the one I am describing here. But to serve the idea, which in relation to romantic love is not to serve two masters, requires strenuous effort, because no beauty can calculate so accurately as the idea can, and no girl's disapproval is so heavy as the idea's displeasure that is, more than anything else, impossible to forget.

If I were thoroughly to pursue all the moods of this young person to the extent that I was aware of them, not to mention if I were, in poetic fashion, to bring in a mass of unrelated things, parlours and

dress and beautiful scenery, relatives and friends, this little story could become a lengthy novel. I would rather not do that, though. I like lettuce, but I eat only the heart; the leaves, it seems to me, are for pigs. I prefer, like Lessing, the pleasures of conception to the pains of giving birth.\* If anyone has anything against this, he can go ahead and complain. I do not care.

Time passed. When possible, I came to his nightly devotions, where through wild cries he would get his daily exercise since he used the daytime to entertain the girl. As Prometheus, nailed to a cliff where a vulture pecked at his liver, enthralled the gods with his prophecies, so did he enthrall his beloved. He mustered all his strength every day, because every day was like the last. It could not go on like this though, he chafed at the leash that held him. But the more his passion boiled, the more blissful his songs, the more tender his speech, the tighter became the leash. It was impossible for him to make a real relationship from such a misunderstanding; it would be to abandon her to an eternal deception. To explain to her the confusion, that she was just the visible form, whereas his thoughts, his soul, sought something else that he had attributed to her, that would be to wrong her so deeply that his pride protested against it. This was a method he despised more than anything. In this he was [19] correct. It is despicable to deceive and seduce a girl. It is even more despicable, however, to leave a girl in such a way that one avoids becoming a scoundrel, but instead makes a brilliant retreat in that one puts her off with the explanation that she was not the ideal, but comforts her with the fact that she was one's muse. This can be done, if one has some experience in dealing with girls, and she will accept this explanation if she is desperate. One makes a good escape this way, remains an upstanding, even admirable person, and yet she is in this way wronged more deeply than the girl who *knows* she was deceived. Thus, in every romantic relationship that cannot be fully realized, despite the fact that it has begun, delicacy is the insulting thing, and he who has an eye for the erotic, and is not a coward, easily sees that to be indelicate is the only means left to him to preserve the girl's honour.

In order to put an end to his suffering, I encouraged him to dare to go to extremes. The essential thing was simply to find a point of agreement. I made the following suggestion: lay waste to everything. Transform yourself into a contemptible person whose only pleasure

is in tricking and deceiving. If you can do this, then you will have established equality. There could not, in such a case, be any talk of an aesthetic difference that vindicated you in relation to her, something people all too often are inclined to concede, a so-called exceptional individuality. She would then be victorious; she would be absolutely in the right, and you absolutely in the wrong. Do not do it too quickly though, because this will only inflame her love. Try, at first, if possible, just to be a little annoying to her. Do not tease her, that will only excite her. No, be changeable, nonsensical. Do one thing one day, and another thing the next, but all without passion, blunderingly. Do not let this degenerate, however, into inattentiveness. On the contrary, your external attentiveness must be as great as ever, just transformed into a kind of official duty lacking any genuine passion. Instead of romantic ecstasy, constantly produce a mawkish quasi-love, that is neither indifference nor genuine desire. Allow your whole manner to be as unpleasant as it is to see a man drool. Do not start though, unless you have the strength to complete the thing, or the game is lost, because there is nothing so smart as a girl, that is, when the question is whether she is loved or not, and there is no operation so difficult as an extraction if one has to employ the instrument himself, an instrument that generally only time knows how to handle. Come to me after you have got everything started, and I will take care of the rest. Allow the rumour to be spread that you are [20] involved with someone else in a very unpoetic relationship, because otherwise you will only egg her on. That such a thing could not occur to you yourself, I understand completely. It is understood between us that she is the only one you love, even though it is impossible for you to translate this poetic relationship into an actual love. There must be some truth to the rumour. I will take care of that. I will find a girl here in town with whom I can arrange something.

It was not merely concern for this young person that moved me to come up with this plan. I cannot deny though that I had gradually come to think ill of his beloved. That she failed to notice anything, that she had not the least intimation of his sufferings, that she did nothing, did not try to save him with what he needed and what she could give him—freedom. This would save him if she gave it to him, because in this way she would, through her magnanimity, be in the superior position, she would not be wronged! I can forgive a girl anything, but I cannot forgive that in her love she mistakes love's task.

When a girl's love is not self-sacrificing, then she is not a woman but a man, and I will always take pleasure in allowing her to become a laughing-stock. And what a subject for a comic writer, to let such a lover, whose love first sucked the blood out of her beloved to the point where he in despair and desperation breaks with her—to let such a lover appear an Elvira,\* who performs brilliantly in this role, whose situation is bemoaned by relatives and friends, an Elvira who is the lead singer in the chorus of the deceived, an Elvira who can speak impressively about the faithlessness of men, a faithlessness that apparently is going to be the death of her, an Elvira who does all this with confidence and assurance, to whom it does not for one second occur that her faithfulness was more closely calculated to be the death of her beloved. Feminine fidelity is great, particularly when it is declined. It is always unfathomable and incomprehensible. The situation would have been priceless if her lover, despite his need, had preserved enough humour not to waste an angry word on her, [21] but had confined himself to a more profound revenge, to strengthen her in the delusion that she was shamefully deceived by him. If she believed this, then the revenge, if the young person were able to carry out my plan, would affect her terribly, yet with poetic justice. He is convinced that he is doing the best thing he can, but this, if she is selfish, will be the worst punishment. He treats her with the greatest possible erotic solicitude. Yet his method will be supremely painful, if she is selfish.

He was willing and applauded my plan. I found what I sought, in a milliner's shop, a young and very lovely girl, whose future I promised to take care of if she participated in my plan. He would be seen with her in public places, visit her at such times that there could be no doubt that they had an understanding. To this end, I secured an apartment for her in a house with access to two streets, so he need only walk through the house late in the evening to confirm the suspicions of the servant-girls, and others, and to get the rumours started. Once everything was in place, I would make sure his beloved did not remain ignorant of his new relationship. The seamstress was attractive, but in such a way that the beloved, quite apart from being jealous, would be astonished that such a girl was preferred to her. If I had focused on the beloved, the seamstress would have been a little different, but because I could know nothing in this respect with any certainty, and because I did not want to be too devious in relation

to the young person, my choice was thoroughly consistent with his method.

The seamstress was engaged for one year. The relationship had to be maintained for this long in order fully to deceive the beloved. During this time he was, in addition, if possible to work on his transformation into a poet. If he succeeded in this, then a *redintegratio in statum pristinum*<sup>1</sup> could be effected. In the course of the year—and this is very important—the young girl would have the opportunity to extricate herself from the relationship in that he would have failed to make its direction clear. If this should happen, that she, when the moment of repetition came, had become tired, well, he would in any case have behaved magnanimously.

Thus everything was prepared. I already had a tight grip on the reins. I was unusually anxious concerning the outcome. But the young man disappeared. I never saw him again. He had not had [22] the strength to carry out the plan. His soul lacked the elasticity of irony. He had not had the strength to swear irony's promise of silence, to keep the promise, and only he who keeps silent amounts to anything. Only he who can really love, only he is a human being, only he who can give his love any sort of expression whatever, only he is an artist. In a certain sense, it was perhaps right that he did not even attempt it, because he could hardly have endured the horrors of the adventure. I was concerned from the beginning by the fact that he needed a confidant. He who knows how to keep silent, he discovers an alphabet that has just as many letters as the ordinary one, so he is able to express everything in his secret language. No sigh is so deep that he does not have laughter that corresponds to it in this secret language, and no entreaty so obtrusive that he is not clever enough to redeem it. There would come a point for him where he would be near to losing his mind. This is just a phase though, even though it is a terrible one. It is like the fever one gets between 11.30 and 12.00 at night. By 1.00 though, one works more intrepidly than ever. If one can endure this insanity, one will win in the end.

But I digress. I had actually intended this story to show that the love of recollection in fact makes a person unhappy. My young friend did not understand repetition. He did not believe in it, and thus failed to will it with enough strength. His fate was sad in that

<sup>1</sup> Return to the original state of things.

he really loved the girl, but in order actually to love her, he first had to be freed from the poetic confusion into which he had fallen. He could have confessed this to the girl. This is the seemly thing to do when one wants to end a relationship with a girl. He did not want to do this, though. I agreed with him entirely in his view that this would be wrong. He would in this way have deprived her of the opportunity to exist autonomously, and freed himself perhaps from becoming an object of her contempt as well as from a gathering anxiety concerning whether he would ever be able to recover what he had lost.

If he had only believed in repetition, what might this young person not have become? What heartfelt intensity could he not have achieved in his life?

I have, however, gone further into this story than I had intended. My point was simply to present the first phase, where it became clear [23] that this young person was, in a very real sense, the grieving knight of recollection's one happy love. The reader will perhaps allow me to reflect once again on the moment when, intoxicated with recollection, he came to my room, when his heart constantly '*ging ihm über*'<sup>1</sup> in that verse of Poul Møller's, when he confided to me that he had to restrain himself to keep from spending the entire day with his beloved. He repeated this same verse the evening we parted. I will never be able to forget that verse. I could more easily erase the memory of his disappearance,\* than the memory of this moment, the facts of which caused me much less anxiety than this situation. I am constituted in such a way that in the first shudder of foreboding my soul has at once run through all the consequences that often require a long time actually to become apparent. One never forgets the concentration of foreboding. I believe that an observer must be constituted in this way, yet when he is so constituted, he will suffer a great deal. The first phase must overwhelm him almost to the point of fainting. In this moment of weakness, the idea impregnates him, and from that point begins his relation to actuality. If a person does not have this feminine quality that allows the idea to come into the proper relation to him, which is always to impregnate, then he will not be fit to be an observer, because he who does not discover the whole, really discovers nothing.

<sup>1</sup> Overflowed.



After we parted that evening, and he once again thanked me for having helped him pass the time that went all too slowly in relation to his impatience, I thought then to myself that presumably he is open-hearted enough to tell the young girl everything. Would she then love him even more? What if he did this? If he had asked me, I would have advised against this. I would have told him: 'Be firm in the beginning, erotically, this is the smartest thing to do, unless your soul is so serious that you can direct your thought to something much higher.' If he had told the girl the truth, he would not have acted wisely.

Anyone who has had an opportunity to observe young girls, to lure them into conversation, will often have heard this sort of statement: 'N.N. is a good person, but he is boring; on the other hand F.F. is so exciting and interesting.' Every time I hear these words in a little miss's mouth, I think: you should be ashamed of yourself. It is sad to hear a young girl say such a thing. If a young man lost himself in the realm of the interesting, who, other than a young girl, could save [24] him. Is she not also guilty? Either the one concerned is unable to do it, and then it is indelicate to demand it, or he can do it and so... A young girl should always be careful never to coax forth the interesting. The girl who does this always loses from the perspective of the idea, because the interesting can never be repeated. The girl who does not do this is always victorious.

Six years ago I took a trip thirty miles into the country. I stopped at an inn where I also ate lunch. I had consumed a pleasant and tasty meal, was in a good mood, had a cup of coffee in my hand whose aroma I was in the process of inhaling, when suddenly a lovely young girl, delicate and charming, passed by the window and into the courtyard that was part of the inn. I concluded that she was headed for the garden. I was young—thus I gulped down my coffee, lit a cigar, and was in the process of pursuing the signal of fate and the girl's tracks, when there was a knock on my door and in walks—the girl. She gives me a friendly curtsy and then asks whether it was my carriage that was in the courtyard, whether I was going to Copenhagen, and whether I would allow her to ride along. The modest and yet genuinely feminine way she did this was enough to cause me to immediately lose sight of the exciting and interesting. And yet it is much more interesting to ride thirty miles alone with a young girl, in one's own carriage with a driver and a footman, to have her entirely

under one's power, than it is to meet her in a garden. And yet, I am convinced that even a less considerate person than myself would not have felt tempted. The trust with which she placed herself under my power is a better defence than all the shrewdness and cunning a young girl could muster. We rode together. She could not have been more secure if she had travelled with a brother or a father. I was silent and reserved. Only when it seemed that she was going to speak was I obliging. My driver had orders to hurry. We spent five minutes at each stop. I got out. With my hat in my hand I asked whether she wished for some refreshment. My footman stood behind me, also hat in hand. As we approached the city I had my driver take a side-road, where I alighted and walked the remaining two miles to Copenhagen, in order to avoid meeting anyone and thus coming into a situation that might disturb her. I have never tried to learn who she [25] was, where she lived, what could have occasioned her sudden trip. She has always been a pleasant memory for me though, which I have not allowed myself to sully with even an innocent curiosity.—A girl who desires the interesting becomes a snare in which she herself is caught. A girl who does not desire the interesting, she has faith in repetition. All honour to one who was originally so. All honour to the one who became so with time.

I must constantly repeat, however, that repetition was the occasion for my saying all this. Repetition is the new category that must be discovered. If one knows something about modern philosophy, and is conversant with Greek philosophy, one will easily see that precisely this category explains the relation between the Eleatics and Heraclitus,\* and that repetition is really that which has mistakenly been referred to as mediation. It is unbelievable how much Hegelian philosophy brags about mediation, so much foolish nonsense, which under its auspices enjoyed honour and glory. It would be better to think through mediation and to do justice to the Greeks. The Greeks' development of the doctrine of being and nothing, the development of 'the moment', 'non-being', etc., beats everything in Hegel. 'Mediation'\* is a foreign word. 'Repetition' is a good Danish word, and I congratulate the Danish language for its contribution to philosophical terminology. It has not been explained in our own time how mediation comes about, whether it is a result of a movement of the two phases and in what sense it is already contained in them, or whether it appears as something new and, if so, how.

In this respect, it is important to take the Greek ruminations on the concept of κίνησις,<sup>1</sup> which corresponds to the modern category of 'transition', into account. The dialectic of repetition is easy, because that which is repeated has been, otherwise it could not be repeated; but precisely this, that it has been, makes repetition something new. When the Greeks said that all knowing was recollecting, they were also thus saying that all of existence, everything that is, has been. When one says that life is repetition, one also says that that which has existed now comes to be again. When one lacks the categories of recollection and repetition, all of life is dissolved into an empty, meaningless noise. Recollection is the ethnic view\* of life, repetition the modern. Repetition is the *interest* of metaphysics, and also the interest upon which metaphysics becomes stranded. Repetition is the solution in every ethical contemplation, repetition is the *conditio sine* [26] *qua non*<sup>2</sup> for every dogmatic problem.

Judge what one will concerning what I say here about repetition—that is, that I say it and in this way, following Hamann's example, *mit mancherlei Zungen mich ausdrücke, und die Sprache der Sophisten, der Wortspiele, der Creter und Araber, Weißen und Mohren und Creolen rede, Critik, Mythologie, rebus und Grundsätze durcheinander schwatze, und bald κατ' ἀνθρώπων bald κατ' ἔξοχην argumentire*.\* On the assumption that what I say here is not simply a lie, it would perhaps be best if I sent my aphorisms to a systematic appraiser. Perhaps something could come of this, a mention in the system—what a thought! Then I would not have lived in vain!

As far as the meaning repetition has for a thing, one can say a great deal without actually committing a repetition. When Professor Ussing,\* in his time, gave a speech for the 28th of May Society,\* and one of his remarks was not well received, what did the professor, who was then always resolute and vehement, do? He pounded on the table and said: 'I repeat.' That is, he waited until what he had said became accepted through repetition. A few years ago, I heard a priest give precisely the same speech on two ceremonious occasions. Had he been of the same opinion as the professor, the second time he climbed into the pulpit he would have pounded on it and said: I repeat what I said last Sunday. But he did not, and gave

<sup>1</sup> Motion.

<sup>2</sup> The indispensable condition.

no indication that he was repeating himself. He was not of the same opinion as Professor Ussing, and who knows, perhaps the distinguished Professor Ussing is no longer of the opinion that it was good for his speech to be repeated. When, during a royal celebration, the queen had told a story and all the courtiers, including a deaf minister, had laughed at it, this minister then stood up and asked to be allowed to tell a story of his own and told the same story. Question: what view did he have of the meaning of repetition? When a schoolteacher says: this is the second time, I repeat, that Jespersen must sit quietly, and this same Jespersen receives a mark for repeated disruptiveness, then the meaning of repetition is precisely the opposite.

I am not, however, going to dwell on such examples any longer. I'm going to speak instead about a voyage of discovery I undertook in order to test the possibility and meaning of repetition. Unbeknownst to anyone (in order, namely, that too much discussion would not cause me to become unable to do the experiment, and in another sense bored with repetition) I sailed by steamship to Stralsund and then took the *Schnellpost*<sup>1</sup> to Berlin. There is a difference of opinion among the learned as to which seat in a stagecoach is the most comfortable. My *Ansicht*<sup>2</sup> is the following: they are all equally terrible. The previous time, I had one of the outer seats toward the front of the vehicle (this is considered by many to be a great coup) and was for thirty-six hours, together with those near me, so violently tossed about that when I came to Hamburg not only had I nearly lost my mind, but also my legs. The six of us who sat in this vehicle were worked together for these thirty-six hours so that we became one body, in such a way that I got an impression of what happened to the Molbos\* who, after having sat together for a long time, could no longer recognize which legs were their own. In order to become a limb of what would at least be a smaller body, this time I chose a seat in the coupé.\* This was a change. Otherwise, everything repeated itself. The postillion\* blew the horn, I closed my eyes, surrendered to despair, and thought, as I am wont to do on such occasions: God knows whether you will be able to endure this, whether you will actually come to Berlin, and if so, whether you will ever be human again, able to free yourself in the individualism of isolation, or whether you will retain this memory that you are a limb of a huge body.

<sup>1</sup> Express coach.

<sup>2</sup> View.

Then I arrived in Berlin. I hurried immediately to my old lodgings in order to ascertain the extent to which repetition was possible. I dare say that last time I was so fortunate as to get one of the best apartments in Berlin, I emphasize this because I have seen many. Gendarmenmarkt is the most beautiful square in Berlin, *das Schauspielhaus*,<sup>1</sup> the two churches, are luminous, seen from the window in the moonlight. That memory was a large part of why I set off on this trip. One ascends to the first floor of a gas-illuminated building, opens a little door, and is in the entryway. To the left there is a glass door that leads into a small room. If one continues straight ahead, one will come to the anteroom. Just off this room are two smaller, completely symmetrical rooms, identically furnished, so that they appear to be mirror-images of each other. The interior room is tastefully illuminated. A candelabra stands on a desk beside a tasteful and simply designed easy-chair, upholstered in red velvet. The first room is not illuminated. The pale moonlight is thus blended here with the stronger lighting of the inner room. One can sit here in a chair by the window, gaze out at the square, and watch the shadows of the passers-by as they hurry across the walls. Everything is transformed into a scenic backdrop. One's soul becomes enveloped in a dreamlike dusk. One feels a desire to throw on a cloak and sneak stealthily along the wall like a spy, taking in every sound. One does not do it, of course, but only imagines a younger self doing it. One finishes one's cigar, and thus retires to the inner room and begins to work. It is past midnight. One extinguishes the candles and lights instead a little night candle. The moonlight now reigns supreme. A single shadow seems even darker, and the sound of a single footstep takes for ever to die away. The cloudless vault of heaven appears dreamy and sad, as if the end of the world had already come and heaven continued undisturbed in its self-preoccupation. One goes out again into the front room, the hall, into the little room and—if one is among the fortunate who can sleep—sleeps. [28]

But no! Repetition was not possible here. My landlord, the chemist, *er hatte sich verändert*,<sup>2</sup> in the pregnant sense in which the Germans understand these words, and as far as I know, 'to change' is used in a similar way in some quarters of Copenhagen—i.e. he had married. I wanted to congratulate him, but because my command of

<sup>1</sup> The theatre.

<sup>2</sup> He had changed.

the German language is limited to the extent that I do not know the precise expressions one would use in specific circumstances, and in particular in these circumstances, I restricted myself to a sort of pantomime gesture. I placed my hand over my heart and looked at him with an expression of tender appreciation. He shook my hand. After this exchange, he proceeded to produce a proof of the aesthetic validity of marriage.\* And he succeeded, precisely as well as he had succeeded the last time in proving the perfection of bachelorhood. When I speak German, I am the most accommodating man in the world.

My previous landlord wanted very much to be of service to me, and I wanted to lodge with him, so I accepted a one-room apartment with a small foyer. Alas! Alack! I thought when I came home the first evening and lit the candles. Is this repetition? I became immediately out of sorts, or if one wishes, in precisely the sort of mood the day demanded, because fate had strangely arranged that I should come to Berlin on the *allgemeine Buß- und Betttag*.<sup>1</sup> Berlin was prostrate. One did not throw [29] ashes in the eyes of others with the words: *Memento o homo! Quod cinis esset in cinerem revertaris*;<sup>2</sup> but the whole city was nevertheless covered in dust. I thought at first that it was a government measure, but later I became convinced that it was the wind that was responsible for this inconvenience, and, without regard for what a person would like, followed its own mood or its unfortunate habit, because in Berlin at least every other day is Ash Wednesday. This is not really relevant, though, to my subject. This discovery did not concern 'repetition', because the last time I was in Berlin I did not notice this phenomenon, presumably because it had been winter.

Once one is comfortably installed in an apartment, when one in this sense has a fixed point from which to venture forth, a secure hiding-place, to which one can return to devour his prey—something I value very highly because, like certain predators, I cannot eat while anyone watches—then one sets out to learn what interesting sights the city has to offer. If one is a traveller *ex professo*,<sup>3</sup> an express courier, who travels just to be able to sniff everything others have also sniffed, or to write the names of important tourist attractions in one's travel diary, or alternatively to write one's own name in the volume of world travellers, one engages a *Lohndiener*<sup>4</sup> and in this way

<sup>1</sup> First day Lent (Ash Wednesday.) Literally, 'a day of universal fasting and penance'.

<sup>2</sup> Remember, O Man! That from ashes you came and to ash you will return.

<sup>3</sup> By trade.

<sup>4</sup> Literally, 'wage earner'. Here, however, it means a guide.

gets *das ganze Berlin*<sup>1</sup> for four *Groschen*. This method makes one an impartial observer whose statements any police report would count as trustworthy. If, on the other hand, there is nothing in particular one has to accomplish on one's trip, one can just wait for something to happen. One will sometimes see things in this way that others miss, look past the important sights, catch an accidental impression that has meaning only for oneself. Such a careless vagabond does not usually have much to communicate to others, and if he does try to communicate something, he easily runs the risk of undermining the positive opinion good people might have concerning his moral character and manners. If a person had been travelling abroad for a while, but had never travelled by train, would he not be expelled from all polite society! What if a person had been to London and had never been in the Tunnell\* What if a person arrived in Rome, fell in love with some small part of the city that was for him an inexhaustible source of pleasure, and then left Rome again without having seen a single tourist attraction!

Berlin has three theatres. The operas and ballets performed in Berlin's Opera are said to be *großartig*.<sup>2</sup> The pieces performed in the Theatre are not simply for amusement,\* they must be instructive, must educate. I don't know. I do know, on the other hand, that there is a theatre in Berlin called the Königstädter Theatre. Tourists [30] rarely visit this theatre, though they visit it more often than they visit the more out-of-the-way places of amusement where a Dane would get the chance to jog his memory of Lars Mathiesen and Kehlet.\* When I came to Stralsund and read in the paper that *der Talisman*\* was going to be performed in this theatre, I was immediately in high spirits. The memory of this piece was awakened in my soul, and the first time I saw it, it was as if this first impression merely called forth a memory from within my soul that reached far back in time.

There is no young person with any imagination who has not at some time felt himself captured by the magic of the theatre and wished to become part of this mock actuality, in order, as a *doppelgänger*, to see and hear himself, to disperse himself into a multiplicity of all his possibilities, and yet in such a way that each possibility is a self. This desire naturally expresses itself at a very young age. Only the

<sup>1</sup> The whole of Berlin.

<sup>2</sup> Magnificent.

imagination is awakened to the dream of personality; everything else continues to sleep securely. In such a self-contemplation of the imagination, the individual has no actual shape, but is a mere shadow, or more correctly, the actual shape is invisibly present and is thus not content to cast one shadow. The individual has a multiplicity of shadows, all of which resemble him and each of which is, at least fleetingly, equally justified as being his self. Personality has not yet been discovered, its energy announces itself only in the passion of possibility, because it is in the life of spirit as it is with many plants—the central shoot comes last. This shadowy existence also demands satisfaction, and it is never beneficial to a person if it does not get time to express itself, while on the other hand it is sad, or even comical, when the individual mistakenly confuses this shadow with himself. And such a person's pretensions to be an actual person are as doubtful as the demand for immortality, of those who are not in a position to appear personally on the Day of Judgement, but appear instead in the form of good intentions, resolutions, half-hour plans, and such. The main thing is that everything happens at the right time. Everything has its time in youth, and what has had its time then has its time again later, and it is just as healthy for an older person to have something laughable in his past as it is for him to have something heart-rending.

- [31] When, in a mountainous region, one hears the wind, day in and day out, steadfastly, unchangingly, play the same theme, one is perhaps tempted to abstract, for a moment, from the imperfection of the analogy, and take pleasure in this symbol of the consistency and security of human freedom. One does not think, perhaps, that there was a time when the wind that has now for many years resided in these mountains, came as a stranger to this place, cast itself about confusedly, meaninglessly, through the cliffs and caverns, produced first a howl with which it almost startled itself, then a roar from which it fled, then a moan whose origin was even to itself a mystery, then a sigh from anxiety's abyss, a sigh so deep that it became frightened and doubted for a moment whether it dare take up residence in this place, then an exuberant, lyrical waltz; until, after it had come to know its instrument, it worked all these into the melody that it now, day in and day out, unvaryingly plays. Thus the individual becomes lost in his own possibility, discovering first one and then another possibility. But the potential of the individual does not simply want



to be heard, it is not simply passing through like the weather. It is *gestaltende*,<sup>1</sup> thus it also wants to be seen. Each of its possibilities is thus a sounding shadow. The cryptic individual has as little faith in great noisy passions as he has in evil's cunning whisper, as little faith in the blessed shouts of joy as in sorrow's endless sighing. Such an individual wants only to see and hear with pathos, but—and this is important—to see and hear himself. He does not actually want to hear himself, though. That is not the point. Now the cock crows, twilight's phantoms flee, night's voices are silenced. If they remained, then we would be in an entirely different region, where everything takes place under the anxious watch of accountability; then we would be in the region of the demonic. In order to avoid getting an impression of his actual self, the cryptic individual needs his environment to be as light and transitory as shadows, as the effervescence of words without an echo.

Such is a scenic environment, which is therefore particularly well suited to the *Schattenspiel*<sup>2</sup> of the cryptic individual. Among the shadows, where he discovers himself, whose voices are his voice, there is perhaps a highwayman. He must recognize himself in this mirror-image, the highwayman's manly form, his fleeting yet penetrating look, passion's mark on his furrowed brow. Everything is there. He lies in wait at the mountain pass, he listens for the sound of a coach approaching, he whistles, the band springs into action. His [32] voice must bellow above the noise. He must be cruel, allow everything to be cut down, indifferently turning away from it. He must be chivalrous to the frightened girl, etc., etc. A highwayman is at home in sinister woods. If one wished to place this imaginary hero in such a setting, to provide him with the necessary trappings and request only that he wait calmly until one had retreated a couple of miles away, in order, in this way, to be able to surrender completely to his passionate rage—then I think he would be speechless. It would perhaps be with him as it was with a man who, a few years ago, honoured me with his literary confidence. He came to me and apologized for the fact that he was so overwhelmed by an abundance of ideas that it was impossible for him to write anything down, because he could not write fast enough. He asked me if I would mind functioning as

<sup>1</sup> Creative.

<sup>2</sup> Shadow play.

his secretary, and write down his ideas as he dictated them to me. I immediately sensed mischief, and comforted him with the fact that my writing could keep pace with a galloping horse, because I wrote only one letter of each word and yet I assured him that I could read everything I had written. My desire to be of service knew no bounds. I had a large table brought in, numbered several sheets of paper in order that I would not have to waste time turning them, and laid out a dozen steel pens with shafts, dipped the first pen in ink—and the man began to talk as follows: yes! You see, Esteemed Sirs, what I would really like to say, is... When he was finished with his speech, I read it back to him, and since that time he has never again asked me to serve as his secretary.

This highwayman would presumably find the standard by which he is measured too great, and yet in another sense, too small. No, paint him a backdrop with a tree, hang a lamp in front that makes the light even stranger, and these woods are suddenly larger than any actual woods, larger even than North America's primeval forest, and yet his voice can penetrate them without his even becoming hoarse. This is the sophistical desire of the imagination, to have the whole world like this in a nutshell, a nutshell that is larger than the whole world and yet not so large that the individual cannot fill it.

Such an inclination toward dramatic performance and expectoration is in no way an indication of a theatrical vocation. A theatrical vocation shows itself immediately in a disposition to individuality, and even the richest awakening talent does not have this sort of range. This desire is simply the immaturity of the imagination. This is entirely different from the desire that has its foundation in vanity [33] and an inclination to show off. Then the whole thing has no deeper source than vanity, a source that unfortunately can be fairly deep.

Even if this phase in an individual's life disappears, it comes again at a more mature age, when the soul has seriously begun to take shape. While art was perhaps not important enough to the individual, he can still have the desire to return to this first state and take it up again. He wishes then to be comical, to relate comically to his theatrical performance. Since neither tragedy, nor comedy, nor satire will satisfy him, precisely because of their perfection, he returns to farce. The same phenomenon is found in other spheres. One sometimes sees that the more mature individual, who satiates himself on actuality's strong food, is not really affected by a

particularly good painting. On the other hand, he can be moved by the sight of a Nüremberg print,\* a picture like those that not so long ago were sold in many shops. One sees there a landscape that is meant to represent a typical rural scene. This abstraction does not admit of artistic representation. The objective is therefore achieved through a contradiction, namely with an accidental concretion. And yet I always want to ask people whether they do not, from such a landscape, get the impression of a rural scene in general and whether they still have this concept from their childhood. When one is a child, one has such enormous categories that they would now almost make one dizzy. Then one could cut from a piece of paper a man and a woman, who were man and woman in general in an even stricter sense than Adam and Eve were. A landscape painter, whether he endeavours to achieve his effect through a faithful reproduction or through an ideal presentation, leaves the individual perhaps cold. Such a picture, however, produces an indescribable effect, in that one does not know whether one should laugh or cry. The whole effect depends upon the mood of the observer. There is no one who has not been through a period when no richness of language, no passionate interjection, was sufficient, when no expression, no gesticulation was satisfactory, because nothing satisfied except the wildest spontaneous leaps and somersaults. Perhaps this person learned to dance, perhaps he often watched ballets and admired the dancers' art, perhaps there came a time when ballet no longer had any effect on him. And yet there were moments when he could retreat to his room, indulge himself, [34] and feel an indescribably humorous relief in standing on one leg in as aesthetically pleasing position, or tell the whole world to go to the devil with an *entrechat*.\*

They show farces in the Königstädter Theatre. The people who gather there are thus naturally very diverse. He who would study the pathology of laughter in a variety of estates and temperaments ought not to lose the opportunity offered by the performance of a farce. The shouts and shrill laughter from the gallery and the second balcony are something completely different from the applause of a sophisticated and critical audience. It is a constant accompaniment without which farce could not be performed. Farce is associated, for the most part, with the baser aspects of life, and thus those in the gallery and the second balcony recognize themselves immediately. Their noise and shouts of 'bravo' are not judgements of the aesthetic

approval of individual actors, but purely lyrical outbursts of their own well-being. They are not even conscious of themselves as an audience, but would like to be down with the actors on the street or wherever the scene happens to take place. Since, however, the theatrical distance makes this impossible, they conduct themselves like children who are allowed to watch a commotion in the street only through the window. The orchestra and the first balcony\* also shake with laughter, even if it is of an essentially different sort from the Cimbrian-Teutonic\* screeching emanating from the cheaper seats. There is an infinitely nuanced variety of laughter even here, and in a completely different sense from what one would have with the performance of a first-class comedy. Whether one considers it a perfection or an imperfection, this is how it is. Every ordinary aesthetic category fails when it comes to farce, which is in no way able to bring about a uniform mood on the part of the more sophisticated public, because with farce the effect depends largely upon the observer's own energetic contribution. The individuality of the observer asserts itself here in an entirely different sense, and is thus in its enjoyment emancipated from all aesthetic obligations, such as to be moved emotionally, to laugh, to admire, etc., in the traditional manner. To watch a farce is, for the sophisticated, like playing the lottery, only without the unpleasantness of winning money. Such uncertainty does not serve the ordinary theatregoing public. They like, therefore, to denigrate farce or look down on it contemptuously, which is the worse for them. A real theatregoing public generally has a certain narrow-minded seriousness. They want, or in any case imagine they want, to be educated and ennobled by the theatre.

- [35] They want to have had, or at least to imagine they have had, a rare aesthetic pleasure. They want, as soon as they have read the poster, to be able to know in advance how the evening will go. Such prescience is impossible with farce, because the same farce can leave two very different impressions, and what is strange is that it can be least effective when it is best performed. One cannot, therefore, trust the reviews of friends and neighbours and the newspapers concerning whether it was entertaining. That determination can be made only by the individual. No critic has yet been able to prescribe an etiquette for a sophisticated theatregoing public that watches a farce. No *bon ton*<sup>1</sup> can be established in this way. The otherwise so reassuring

<sup>1</sup> Good tone.

mutual respect between the theatre and the public is suspended. A farce can put one in the most unpredictable mood. One can thus never know with certainty whether, while in the theatre, one behaved as a respectable member of society who has laughed and cried in the right places. One cannot, as a conscientious spectator, admire the finely developed characters that are necessary in a drama, because the characters in a farce are all abstract generalizations. The situation, the action, the lines—everything is an abstract generalization. One can thus just as easily become sad as doubled over with laughter.

No effect of a farce is brought about through irony, but through naivety. The spectator must therefore become involved as an individual with the spectacle. The naivety of farce is so illusory that it is impossible for the sophisticated to relate to it naively. But it is precisely the relating of the spectator to farce from which much of the amusement comes, and he must be willing to dare to risk this, though he will seek vainly to the right and to the left and in the newspapers for a guarantee that he has actually been amused. For a sophisticated person, on the other hand, who is still unembarrassed enough to dare to be amused all by himself, who has enough self-confidence to know, without seeking advice from anyone else, whether he has been amused, farce will perhaps have a very special meaning, in that now with the spaciousness of abstraction and now with the presentation of a tangible actuality, it will affect his mood differently. He will, of course, refrain from bringing a fixed and definite mood with him so that everything affects him in relation to that mood. He will have perfected his mood, in that he will be able to keep himself in a condition where no particular mood is present, but where all moods are possible.

The farces performed in the Königstädter Theatre are, to my mind, absolutely first class. My opinion is, of course, completely my own. I would not impose it on anyone else and decline any pressure to change it. In order for farce to be performed with complete success, the cast must have a particular composition. There should be two, or at most three, seriously talented, or more accurately, creative geniuses. They must be children of high spirits, intoxicated with laughter, humour's dancers, who even if at other times, even the moment before, they are just like everyone else, immediately upon hearing the stage-manager's bell are transformed, and like the noble Arabian horse, begin to snort and groan, while their nostrils expand,

witnessing to the exertions of the spirit in them that wants to come out and tumble about wildly. They are not so much reflective artists who have studied laughter, as they are lyricists who plunge themselves into the abyss of laughter and then let its volcanic might cast them onto the stage. They have not, therefore, so much calculated what they are going to do as they have allowed the moment and the natural power of laughter to take care of everything. They have the courage to do what the individual ventures to do only when he is alone, what the insane do in the presence of everyone, what the genius knows how to do, with the authority of genius, certain of laughter. They know that their exuberance has no bounds, that there is in them an inexhaustible source of the comical which at each moment almost surprises themselves. They know that they are able to sustain the laughter for the whole evening, without any more effort than I exert in putting this down on paper.

When a theatre known for farces has two such geniuses, that is enough; three is the absolute maximum; more weakens the effect, just as a person dies of hypertension. The other actors do not have to be talents; it is better if they're not. They don't even have to be attractive. It's best if they are a completely contingent seeming collection, on the order of the group that, according to a drawing by Chodowiecki,\* founded Rome. They can even have physical defects; in fact such defects can be a good thing. The fact that one of the actors might be bow-legged, or knock-kneed, overly tall or unnaturally short—all such defects can be of use in farce. The effects they produce can be incalculable. The accidental is the closest thing to the ideal. It has been said that one can divide humanity into officers, serving-girls, and chimneysweeps. This remark is, I believe, not merely witty, but also profound. One would have to be a great speculative talent to come up with a better division. When categories do not ideally exhaust their objects, then the contingent is in all respects preferable because it gets the imagination going. A more or less correct classification, while not entirely satisfactory to the understanding, is nothing to the imagination and is therefore rejected even if it is useful in everyday contexts, as a result partly of the fact that people just are not very smart, and partly because they do not have much imagination. In the theatre, a character must be presented either as the absolutely perfect incarnation of some ideal, or as completely contingent. Serious theatres should deliver the

first type. Too often, however, it is considered enough if an actor is a good-looking fellow, well built, with a face appropriate to the theatre and a good voice. This rarely satisfies me because his performance *eo ipso*<sup>1</sup> awakens the critic in me and as soon as this is aroused it becomes difficult to determine what is required to be a human being, and equally difficult to fulfil the requirement. One would have to agree with me on this point when one remembers that Socrates, despite being very knowledgeable about human nature and having a great deal of self knowledge, did not know with certainty whether he was 'a more complex creature and more puffed up with pride than Typhon, or a simpler, gentler being whom heaven ha[d] blessed with a quite un-Typhonic nature'.\* In farce, on the other hand, the subordinate characters function very well in this sort of abstract category — person in general — and achieve this through being some contingent concretion. Thus one comes no further than to actuality. One should not come any further. The spectator is comically reconciled to the sight of this contingency laying claim to do ideality, which it does by appearing in the artificial world which is the theatrical stage. If there is to be an exception in one of the subordinate characters, then it must be the female love interest. She must, of course, in no way be an artist, but one must make sure, however, in selecting her that she is attractive, that her whole appearance, her movements on the stage, are warm and salutary, that she is pleasant to look at, pleasant, so to speak, to have around.

The composition of the actors at the Königstädter Theatre is more or less what I would wish. If I were to make an objection, it would [38] be in relation to the subordinate actors, because I have no problem whatever with Beckmann and Grobecker.\* Beckmann is clearly a comic genius who loses himself lyrically in the comical, not through character development, but through ebullience. He is not great in terms of what is commensurable with art, but admirable in terms of what is incommensurable — the individual and unique. He requires no support from the other actors, and none from the scenery or music. Precisely because he is in the right mood, he brings with him everything that is required. He paints himself into the scene independently of any scenographer, even while he gives himself over to an ecstasy of abandon. What Baggesen says about Sara Nickles\*,

<sup>1</sup> In itself.

that she comes charging into a scene bringing a whole rural landscape with her on her heels, is true of B. as well, except that he walks into a scene. In the serious theatre one rarely sees an actor who can actually walk or stand well. I have seen only one. But what B. is able to do, I have never seen before. He does not just walk, he *comes walking*. To come walking is something completely different, and with this ingenious action he sets the whole scene. He does not just represent an itinerant apprentice lad, he can walk into a scene as this character in such a way that one experiences everything. One glimpses the smiling village from the dust of the country road, hears the sounds of its peaceful activity, sees the footpath that runs down along the pond and how it swings off by the blacksmith's shop, when one sees B. come walking with a little bundle on his back, his staff in his hand, carefree and indefatigable. He can come walking into a scene followed by invisible street urchins. Even Dr Ryge in *King Solomon and Jörgen the Hatter* cannot produce such an effect.\* Yes, Mr. B. is a real economy for a theatre, because if one has him, there is no need either for the urchins or, for that matter, any props. This itinerant apprentice is, however, not a developed character; it is too thrown together in what are in truth its masterful contours. It is an incognito in which the lunatic demon of the comical lives and from which it leaps forth, transporting everything into licentiousness. In this respect, B.'s dancing is incomparable. He has sung his couplet and now begins to dance. What B. dares here is back-breaking because he does not presumably venture to affect the audience in the strictest sense through his graceful movements. He is well beyond this. The lunatic laughter that is in him cannot be contained in either physical [39] form or spoken lines. Only a Münchhausen-like\* grabbing oneself by the neck and repeatedly transcending oneself in a crazy, riotous sort of leapfrog captures this spirit. An individual can, as I said, recognize what relief lies in this, but to be able to do this on stage, that takes a genius. That requires the authority of genius, otherwise it will be utterly loathsome.

Every burlesque comic ought to have a voice that is instantly recognizable from the wings, so that he can thus prepare the way for himself. B. has an excellent voice, which is not, of course, identical here with good vocal chords. Grobecker's voice is harsher, but one word from him on the stage has the same effect as three blows on a trumpet in Dyrhavesbakken.\* It makes one receptive to the humorous. In this



respect I would say that Gr. has an advantage over B. There is in B. a fundamental wildness, an unruly intelligence through which he achieves a kind of lunacy. Gr., on the other hand, climbs at times through the soulful and sentimental to lunacy. I remember having seen him once in a farce represent an estate manager, who, because of his devotion to the noble family he served and because of his belief that the purpose of festive occasions was to beautify the lives of this family, thinks only of having the rural pleasures in readiness for the family's ceremonious arrival. Everything is ready. Gr. chose to represent the god Mercury. He did not alter his overseer's costume at all. He simply put wings on his feet and a helmet on his head. He affects a picturesque pose, standing on one leg, and prepares to give his speech. Gr. is not so great a lyrical talent as B., but he is on the same lyrical good terms with laughter. He has a certain inclination towards correctness, and in this respect often performs masterfully, especially in the dryly comical. He is not a leavening agent for the entire farce in the sense that B. is. He is a genius though, and a genius for farce.

One enters the Königstädter Theatre. One takes one's seat in the first balcony, because the crowd will be relatively small, and when one watches a farce one needs to be comfortable and not in the least disturbed by the importance of art that leads people to allow themselves to be packed into a theatre in order to see a piece as if their eternal salvation depended on it. The air in the theatre is also quite fresh, free of contamination from the sweat of artistic connoisseurs, or the exhalations of art lovers. One can be fairly certain of securing [40] a box all to oneself in the first balcony. If this does not happen, then may I suggest to the reader, in order that he can gain some useful knowledge from what I write here, box no. 5 or 6 to the left. There is a nook in the back where there is a single seat that is incomparably comfortable. One sits alone in one's box. The theatre is empty. The orchestra plays an overture. The music rings throughout the hall, somewhat *unheimlich*,<sup>1</sup> given that the place is so empty. One has not come to the theatre as a tourist, not as an aesthete or critic, but if possible as nothing whatever, and one is as satisfied with the fact that one is as comfortably seated as if in one's own living-room. The orchestra is finished. The curtain has already begun to rise, just slightly.

<sup>1</sup> Eerily.

Then the other orchestra begins, the one that does not follow the conductor's baton but follows an inner instinct, this other orchestra, the natural sounds from the gallery, which has already sensed B. in the wings. I generally sat far back in the box and thus could not see either the second balcony or the gallery, which cast a shadow over my head like that of a huge hat. What had an even more fantastical effect was that while this noise penetrated everything, everywhere I looked the place appeared to be largely empty. The huge space of the theatre thus became for me transformed into a belly, like that of the whale in which Jonah sat. The noise from the gallery was like the rumblings of the whale's viscera. From the moment the gallery begins to stir no other music is needed, because B. animates it and it B.

My unforgettable nursemaid, you fugitive nymph who lived in the stream that ran past my father's farm and who always played along with me when I was a child even though it was simply for your own pleasure! You, my faithful comforter, you who with the passing of the years preserved your innocent purity, who never aged, even while I became old, you quiet nymph in whom I repeatedly sought refuge, so tired of people, so tired of myself, that I needed an eternity to rest, so sad that I needed an eternity to forget, you never denied me what human beings wanted to deny me by making eternity just as busy and even more terrible than time. I would lie next to you then, and lose myself in the immense space of the sky above me and in your peaceful murmuring! You, my happier self, you fleeting life that lives in the stream that runs next to my father's farm, where I lie stretched out as if I were a walking-stick someone had lain on the ground, but I am saved and liberated in the melancholy murmuring! — Thus I lay in [41] my box, tossed away like the clothes of a bather, stretched out beside the stream of shouting and laughter and general abandon that continuously rushed past me. I could see nothing apart from the space of the theatre, hear nothing but its sounds. Only now and then would I get up to watch Beckmann, laugh until I was so tired and satisfied that I would sink back down again by the side of the rushing stream.

This was wonderful, and yet I was still missing something. Then I discovered in the vast emptiness around me a form that delighted me more than Friday delighted Robinson Crusoe. In the box across from me sat a young girl in the third row, half-hidden by an older gentleman and lady who sat in the first row. This young girl could not have been in the theatre in order to be seen, in that in this theatre

one is free of these loathsome feminine performances. She sat in the third row, her clothing was simple and modest, almost like that which she would wear at home. She was not wrapped in sable and marten, but in a large shawl, and from underneath this shawl her modest head extended slightly, as the top blossom on a stalk of lily of the valley extends gently from beneath the protection of its leaf. After I had watched Beckmann, had allowed the laughter to shake me through to the core, after I had sunk back in satisfaction and allowed myself to be carried away by the stream of shouting and merriment, after I had risen and returned again to myself, my eyes sought her, and the sight of her gentle mildness refreshed my whole being. Or when a wilder emotion surfaced in the farce, I would look at her and lose myself in the sight of her as she sat there with her peaceful smile and childlike wonder. She came there every evening, just as I did. I would sometimes fall into thought, occasioned by the sight of her, but these thoughts were merely moods that related back again to her. At one moment I would think she must be a girl who had already had enough of the world, and who thus wrapped her shawl tightly about herself as a kind of withdrawal from the world, and then something in her demeanour would reassure me that she was a happy child who pulled the shawl about herself in pleasure. She had no idea she was being observed, much less that I kept watch over her. It would not have been good for her had she known, and it would have been even worse for me, because there is an innocence, an unselfconsciousness, that even the most pure thought can disturb. One does not discover these things oneself, but if a man's positive genius confides to him where this original hiddenness conceals itself, then he does not offend this and distress his genius. If she had sensed my dumb, half-love-struck joy, then everything would have been damaged beyond repair, even all her love could not have made it right again. [42]

I know a place where a young girl lives, just a few miles from Copenhagen. I know the large, shaded garden with its many trees and bushes. I know where, not far from it, there lies a sloping little thicket from which one can peer undetected down into the garden. I have not told anyone about it, not even my coachman. I deceive him by getting out of the carriage before we reach the spot, and heading off to the right rather than the left. When I cannot sleep, and the sight of my bed frightens me more than an instrument of torture, more than a straitjacket frightens the deranged, then I go out for a

drive that lasts the whole night. I lie in this little thicket in the wee hours of the morning, when life begins to stir again, when the sun first begins to open its eyes, when the birds begin to rustle their wings, when the fox sneaks out of its den, when the farmer stands in his door and looks out over his fields, when the milkmaid heads down to the meadow with her pail, when the farmhand fills the air with the bell-like tones of his scythe as he whets it, happily absorbed in this prelude to what will be the musical accompaniment to the day and its activities—then the young girl emerges from the house. Who could sleep! Who could sleep so easily that sleep does not become a heavier burden than the burdens of the day! Who could rise from his bed, as if no one had rested there, so the bed was cool and pleasant and refreshing to look at, as if the sleeper had not rested there, but only bent over it in order to make it! Who could die in such a way that even his deathbed, as he was borne away, was more inviting to look at than if an attentive mother had carefully fluffed up the down coverlet and pillows so that the child might sleep more soundly. Then the young girl emerges to enjoy the garden (but where is there more enjoyment, in the girl or in the trees!); she kneels to pluck a few flowers from their bushes, then skips about happily, then pauses thoughtfully. What wonderful persuasion does not lie in all this! Here finally my soul finds rest. Happy girl! If a man ever wins your love, I hope you make him as happy by being everything to him, as you make me by doing nothing for me.

*Der Talisman* was to be performed in Königstädter Theatre. The memory of this awakened in my soul. Everything stood before me as vividly as it had that first time. I hurried out to the theatre. I could [43] not get a box to myself though, not even no. 5 or 6 to the left. I had to go to the right. I encountered a group there who did not know whether they should be amused or bored. This sort of company is unequivocally annoying. There was hardly a single empty box. The young girl did not appear to be there, or if she was there, she must have been there with some group. Beckmann failed to make me laugh. I held out for half an hour and then finally left, thinking that repetition was impossible. This made a deep impression on me. I am not all that young. I have had some experience of life. Even before I came to Berlin the first time, I had weaned myself of the practice of trying to calculate uncertain outcomes. I had believed, however, that the pleasure this theatre had provided me was of

an enduring sort. One had to have learned to be humbled and yet aided by existence before one could appreciate this kind of humour, and this seemed to me to suggest that such appreciation would be permanent. Could existence be even more disappointing than a bankrupt! He gives 50 per cent, or at least 30. He gives something, anyway. The comical is the least one can ask; is not even that capable of repetition?

I went home with these thoughts. My desk was prepared. The velvet armchair was still there. The sight of it made me so bitter though, that I almost destroyed it. Everyone in the house had gone to bed, so no one could remove it? What good is a velvet armchair when nothing else corresponds to it. It is like a man going naked while wearing a three-cornered hat. I got into bed without having had one sensible thought. It was so light in the room that, half-waking and half-dreaming, I could still see the velvet armchair. When I finally got up again in the morning I did what I had resolved to do in the night. I tossed the chair into a corner where I could no longer see it.

My home had become dismal to me precisely because it was the wrong sort of repetition. My thoughts were barren, my anxious imagination constantly conjured up tantalizing memories of how the thoughts had presented themselves the last time, and the weeds of these recollections strangled every other thought. I went out to the café I had visited every day on the last trip, to enjoy the beverage that, according to the poet's recipe, when it is 'pure and hot and strong and not misused' can always stand alongside that to which the poet compares it—friendship.\* I am a coffee-lover at least. Perhaps the coffee would be just as good as the last time, one would have thought so anyway, yet I did not like it. The sun burned through the café windows. The atmosphere of the place was oppressive, almost like the air in a casserole, one nearly stewed in it. A draught, like a small trade wind, pierced everything, prohibiting me from thinking about any repetition, even if there would otherwise have been an opportunity to do so. [44]

In the evening I went to the restaurant where I had been in the habit of going on the last trip, and where, presumably through force of habit, I had enjoyed myself. Since I had gone there every evening, I had intimate knowledge of the place. I knew, for example, when the punctual guests left, how they parted from the company they left behind, whether they put their hats on in the inner or the outer

room, when they opened the door or only when they were outside. No one escaped my notice; like Proserpina, I plucked a hair from every head,\* even from the bald.—Everything was exactly the same, the same jokes, the same courtesies, the same patrons, the place was exactly the same—in short, uniform in its sameness. Solomon says a quarrelsome woman is like a constant dripping.\* What might he say about this still life? Repetition was possible here, God help me.

I was at the Königstädter Theatre the next evening. The only thing that repeated itself was that no repetition was possible. Unter den Linden\* was intolerably dusty, every attempt to mingle with people, and thus to bathe in the waters of humanity, was highly discouraging. Whichever way I turned, it was hopeless. The little dancer who had bewitched me the last time with a graceful manoeuvre that resembled the beginning of a leap, had made the leap. The blind man in front of the Brandenburg Gate, my harp player—for I was the only one who showed any concern for him—had a sort of greyish coat instead of the light green one for which I had a nostalgic longing, the one that had made him look like a weeping willow. He was lost to me and won by common humanity. The beadle's\* amazing nose had paled; Professor A.A. had got a new pair of trousers that hung in an almost military fashion.

- [45] After several days' repetition of this, I became bitter, so tired of repetition that I decided to return home. I made no great discovery, yet it was strange, because I had discovered that there was no such thing as repetition. I became aware of this by having it repeated in every possible way.

My home was my last hope. Justinus Kerner tells somewhere\* of a man who became so tired of his home that he had his horse saddled, so that he could ride out into the wide world. After he had ridden a short way, his horse threw him. This turn of events became decisive for him because, as he turned to remount his horse, his eyes fell once again on the home he wanted to leave. He beheld it, and it looked so beautiful that he immediately turned back. I knew that at home I could count on finding everything prepared for repetition. I have always been very suspicious of revolutions, even to the extent that, for this reason, I hate all forms of cleaning or straightening-up, in particular the scrubbing of floors. I had thus left the strictest

instructions to ensure that my conservative principles would be maintained even in my absence. But what happened? My faithful servant was of another mind. He supposed that if he initiated a frenzied cleaning immediately after my departure, the whole thing would be completed by the time I returned home again, and he was certainly the man to accomplish this. I return. I ring the doorbell; my servant appears. It was a moment rich with import. My servant became as pale as a corpse. Through the half-opened door to my rooms I glimpsed the horror: everything was in a state of chaos. I was stunned. He was so confused he did not know what to do. His conscience smote him and—he slammed the door again in my face. That was too much. My distress had reached a climax, my principles sank, I feared the worst, to be treated as a ghost in the manner of Grønmeyer the businessman.\* I realized that there was no such thing as repetition, and my earlier view of life triumphed.

I felt ashamed, that I, who had been so stern with this young man, was now brought to the point where I felt as if I were he, as if all my lofty speeches, which I would not repeat now for any price, had simply been a dream from which I had awakened in order to allow life continuously and faithlessly to *take* everything back *again* that it had given without allowing a *repetition*.\* Or is it not the case that the older one becomes, the more life reveals itself to be deceptive; the smarter one becomes, the more ways one learns to help oneself; the [46] worse off one is, the more one suffers? A small child is completely helpless, and yet it thrives. I remember once having seen a nurse-maid on the street pushing a baby-carriage in which there were two children. The one, just barely a year old, had fallen asleep and lay in the carriage dead to the world. The other was a little girl around two years old, chubby, in short sleeves, just like a little woman. She had pushed herself forward in the carriage and easily took up two-thirds of the space. The smaller child lay next to her as if it were a package the woman had brought with her. With an admirable egoism, the older child appeared not to care for anyone or anything except herself, if she could just make herself comfortable. Then a coach came down the road. The baby-carriage was clearly in danger. People ran to help, but with one healthy shove the nurse managed to push the carriage into a doorway. Everyone was horrified, including myself. Yet throughout this commotion the little madame was

completely calm. She continued peacefully to pick her nose, her expression never changing. Presumably she thought, what do I care? It is the nurse's problem. One will seek in vain for such courage in an older person.

The older one gets, the better one understands life and the more one comes to care for and appreciate comfort. In short, the more competent one becomes, the less one is contented. One will never be completely, absolutely, and in every way content, and it is hardly worth the trouble to be more or less content, so one might as well be thoroughly discontented. Anyone who has really thought through the issue will agree with me that no one is ever granted even as little as half an hour out of his entire life where he is absolutely content in every conceivable way. It goes without saying that more is required for this sort of contentment than that one has food and clothing. I was close to achieving it once. I got up one morning in unusually good humour. This positive mood actually expanded as the morning progressed, in a manner I had never before experienced. By one o'clock my mood had climaxed, and I sensed the dizzying heights of complete contentment, a level that appears on no scale designed to measure moods, not even on the poetic thermometer. My body no longer seemed weighed down by gravity. It was as if I had no body, in that every function hummed along perfectly, every nerve rejoiced, the harmony punctuated by each beat of my pulse which served in

[47] turn only to remind me of the delightfulness of the moment. I almost floated as I walked, not like the bird that cuts through the air as it leaves the earth, but like the wind over the fields, like the nostalgic rocking of waves, like the dreamy progress of clouds across the sky. My being was transparent as the clear depths of the ocean, as the night's self-satisfied stillness, as the soft soliloquy of midday. Every mood resonated melodically in my soul. Every thought, from the most foolish to the most profound, offered itself, and offered itself with the same blissful festiveness. Every impression was anticipated before it came, and thus awoke from within me. It was as if all of existence were in love with me. Everything quivered in deep rapport with my being. Everything in me was portentous; all mysteries explained in my microcosmic bliss that transfigured everything, even the unpleasant, the most annoying remark, the most loathsome sight, the most fatal collision.



As I said, it was exactly at one o'clock that my mood reached its peak, where I sensed the heights of perfect contentment. But then suddenly I got something in my eye. I do not know whether it was an eyelash, an insect, or a piece of dust. I know this though, that my mood immediately plummeted almost into the abyss of despair. This is something that everyone who has ever experienced these heights of contentment, and still speculated to what extent complete contentment was possible, will easily understand. Since that time I have given up any hope of ever being completely contented in every way, given up that hope that I had once nourished, of being, if not always completely content, then at least occasionally completely content, even if these occasions never became more numerous than, as Shakespeare put it, 'a tapster's arithmetic was capable of summing up'.\*

I had already learned all of this before I became acquainted with the young person in question. As soon as I asked myself, or as soon as the question came up, whether complete contentment was possible, even if only for a half an hour, I always passed.\* It was around then that, time and again, I grasped and became enthusiastic about the idea of repetition, through which I became once more a victim of my own theoretical zeal, because I am convinced that if I had not taken that trip with the purpose of deciding this issue, I would have got immense pleasure from it. But I cannot be content with the ordinary. I have to understand the underlying principles. I cannot go about dressed as other people; I have to go in stiff boots! Does not every- [48] one, spiritual and secular orators, poets and writers of prose, skippers and undertakers, heroes and cowards, agree that life is a stream? Where does one get such a foolish idea, and what is even more foolish, elevate it to the level of a principle? My young friend thought: let go, and with that he would be better off than if he had initiated a repetition. Then he would have got his beloved back again, just like the lover in the popular ditty who wanted a repetition, as a nun with shorn hair and pale lips. He wanted a repetition, therefore he got one, and the repetition killed him.

The little nun came walking  
In a snow white veil;  
Her hair was shorn and taken,  
Her lips were thin and pale.

The youth sank down dejected,  
 He sat on a stone apart:  
 He shook and wept pale tears,  
 Asunder broke his heart.\*<sup>1</sup>

Long live the post-horn!\* It is my instrument, for many reasons, principally because one can never be certain of coaxing the same tone out of it twice. A post-horn is capable of producing an infinite number of tones, and the one who puts it to his lips and invests his wisdom in it will never be guilty of a repetition. And he who, instead of answering his friend, hands him a post-horn for his amusement, says nothing, yet explains everything. Praised be the post-horn! It is my symbol. Just as the old ascetics sat a skull on their desks, so shall the post-horn on my desk always remind me of the meaning of life. Long live the post-horn! But the journey is not worth the trouble, because one need not move from the spot in order to become convinced that repetition is impossible. No, one can sit peacefully in one's living-room, when everything is vanity and passes away;\* then one travels more briskly than if one travelled by train, despite the fact that one is sitting still. Everything should remind me of this. My servant should wear a postal uniform and I should myself not go to dinner except in a post-chaise.\* Farewell, farewell, rich hope of youth! Why do you hurry away? What you are hunting does not exist, has no more existence than you do. Farewell, manly strength, why do you stamp so violently on the ground? What you are treading on is a phantom of your own imagination. Farewell, conquering resolve, you will reach your goal because you cannot take the deed with you without turning back, and this you cannot do. Farewell, you beauty of the forest. When I wanted to see you, you had faded! Go then, you rushing river! You are the only one who really knows what you want, because what you want is to flow, to lose yourself in the ocean that is never filled! Play on, life's drama, which no one calls a comedy, no one a tragedy, because no one knows how it ends! Play on, you existential drama, where life, like loans, is never repaid! How is it that no one has returned from the dead? Because life does not know how to captivate in the way death does, because life is not so persuasive as death. Yes, death is brilliantly persuasive, if only one will not argue with it, but just let it speak. Then it persuades

<sup>1</sup> [Kierkegaard's note.] Herder's *Volkslieder*, ed. Falk (Leipzig, 1825), i. 57.

instantly, in such a way that no one has ever been able to object, or to long for the eloquence of life. O death! Great is your persuasiveness. There is no one who can speak so well as the man whose eloquence gave him the name *πεισιθάνατος*,\* because he spoke with such powerful persuasion of you!

## REPETITION

Some time passed. My servant, like a conscientious housewife, made up for his earlier wrong. A monotonous and uniform order was re-established in my living-quarters. All the inanimate objects were in their rightful places, and all the animate ones—my clock, my servant, and myself—went about their usual business, with me pacing about the apartment in my usual measured strides. Despite the fact that I had convinced myself that repetition was impossible, inflexibility combined with a dulling of the powers of observation results in a certain uniformity that is far more stupefying than the most whimsical diversion, and which, in addition, becomes even more stupefying over time, like some kind of magical incantation. The excavation of Herculaneum and Pompeii revealed everything in its place, just as the owners had left it. If I had lived then, the archaeologists would have perhaps been surprised to find a person who paced with measured strides back and forth across the floor. I used every means in order to maintain this existing order. At times, I even went about the room like the emperor Domitian,\* armed with a fly-swatter, pursuing every revolutionary fly who dared buzz about the room. Despite this, however, I showed mercy on three flies. Thus I was living, forgetting the world and believing myself forgotten by it, when I received one day a letter from my young friend. This letter was then followed by more letters, at more or less monthly intervals, without, however, my being able to draw any conclusions with respect to where he was living. He did not want to reveal anything himself. He could well have been deliberately trying to maintain a certain mystery in this respect, by allowing the intervals between his letters to fluctuate from five weeks to just a day over three weeks. He did not want to inconvenience me by initiating a correspondence. Even though I was willing to respond to his letters, he didn't want responses—he just wanted to get things off his chest.

[51]

I could see from his letters what I already knew: that, like every depressive, he was extremely sensitive, and that despite this irritability, as well as because of it, he was fundamentally torn. He wants me to be his confidant, and yet he doesn't want this; it makes him anxious. He feels a certain security in my so-called superiority, and

yet also a certain discomfort. He confides in me, and yet wants no answer. He does not even want to see me. He demands that I keep silent, absolutely silent 'by all that is holy', and yet it makes him furious that I have the power to keep silent. No one, not a single soul, may know that I am his confidant. He does not even want to know it himself. He does not want me to know it. In order to explain this confusion to his satisfaction and gratification, he very politely hints that he really thinks I am mentally ill. How can I respond to such a bold interpretation? Any response would only further support the correctness of the charge—in my mind anyway—while my failure to respond would, in his eyes, serve only as new evidence of my detachment and derangement in that I do not allow myself to be personally affected, let alone offended. This is the thanks one gets when one has disciplined oneself for years to have only an objective intellectual interest in human beings, but to have such interest, if possible, for anyone who is animated by an idea! I tried, for a time, to help the idea that animated him, and now I am reaping the rewards—that I shall both be and not be Being and Nothing, whatever he wishes and without any appreciation for being able to do it, and in this way to help him again with his internal conflict. To the extent that he thought himself of how much indirect recognition there was in this sort of *Zumutung*,<sup>1</sup> he would presumably again become furious. It is more difficult than the most difficult task to be his confidant. He forgets that with one word—if, for example, I refused his correspondence—I could offend him deeply. It was not simply those who betrayed the Eleusinian mysteries\* who were punished, but also those who offended the institution by refusing to be initiated into them. This latter crime, according to the account of a Greek author, was committed by a man named Demonax, who [52] escaped intact through the agency of an ingenious defence.\* My position as a confidant is even more critical, because he is more chaste with his mysteries. He even becomes angry when I do what he most urgently requests—when I keep silent.

If, however, he thinks I have completely forgotten him, then again he does me an injustice. His sudden disappearance made me actually fear that, in his despair, he had done away with himself. Such an action seldom remains hidden for long, so when I read and heard nothing, I decided that he must still be alive, wherever he might be.

<sup>1</sup> Unreasonable demand.

The girl he left in the lurch knew absolutely nothing. He just failed to appear one day, without a word of explanation. Her pain was not immediate. First came a certain fearful foreboding, then the pain began to sink in, with the effect that she slipped softly into a kind of waking dream, unclear about what had happened and what it could mean. The girl became a new object for my observation. My friend was not one of those types that tortures his beloved to an extreme before tossing her aside; on the contrary, she was, at the time of his disappearance, in an enviable position, radiant, full of vitality, enriched by the poetic gifts he had bestowed on her, well nourished on the costly cordial of poetic illusions. It is rare to meet a jilted girl in such a state. When I saw her a few days later, she was still as lively as a freshly caught fish, whereas such a girl is normally as emaciated as a fish that has been kept in a tub. In my conscience I was convinced that he must be alive, and I was thankful that he had not seized in his despair upon the desperate gesture of faking his own death. It is unbelievable how much confusion can be occasioned by the erotic when one party decides he would like to die of sorrow, or would like to be dead as a means of escaping the whole thing. A girl will, according to her own solemn declaration, die of sorrow over the fact that her lover deceived her. But look! Perhaps he was not really a deceiver. Perhaps there was a positive explanation for the whole thing. What he might have done, however, in the fullness of time he is no longer free to do, simply because she had once allowed herself to frighten him with this assurance, because, as he said, she had played this rhetorical trick on him, or in any case said, what a girl must never say, even if she thinks he really is a deceiver, because if

[53] he is a deceiver, then she should be too proud to do such a thing, and if she still believes in him, then she should see that she does him the most terrible wrong. To want to be dead as a means of escaping the whole thing is about as pathetic as one can get, and dishonours the girl in the most offensive way. She believes he is dead, she grieves, she weeps, she mourns honestly and sincerely. She must come to be almost disgusted with herself for having grieved so sincerely when she later discovers that he is still alive and had never had any thoughts whatever of doing away with himself. Or if she first comes to have suspicions in the next life, not over whether he is actually dead—that would be indisputable—but over whether he had been dead back then when she had grieved for him. Such a situation is

stuff for an eschatologist who has understood his Aristophanes (I mean the Greek, not the men, who were called that like *doctores cerei* in the Middle Ages) and his Lucian.\* One could maintain this confusion for a while, in that he was certainly dead and he remained dead. The grieving girl would then awaken, to begin again where they left off, until she discovered there was a little intermediate period.

The memory of the whole thing was reawakened in me when I received his letter. It was in no way a dispassionate recollection. When I came to the clever explanation in his letter that I was deranged, it occurred to me immediately that he now had a secret, deeper even than the deepest secret, and that this secret was jealously guarded by more than a hundred eyes. When we were together it did not escape me that, before he would say anything, he would very carefully insinuate that I was 'strange'. Yes, an observer must be prepared for this. He must know to offer the confessor a little guarantee. A girl who makes a confession always demands a positive guarantee, a man a negative one; the reason for this is feminine humility and devotion and masculine pride and wilfulness. What a comfort it is, then, that the one from whom one seeks advice and explanation is deranged! One need not therefore be ashamed. To talk to such a person is like talking to a tree, 'something one does purely for the sake of curiosity', in case anyone should ask about it. An observer must know how to make himself seem easygoing or else no one will open up to him. Above all, he must guard against ethical stringency or against presenting himself as a morally upright person. [54] This man, one says, has been corrupted. He has been part of, has had, really depraved experiences — ergo, I can easily confide in him, I who am a much better person than he is! That is how it is; I demand nothing of people other than the contents of their consciousness. I weigh these contents, and if they are weighty enough, then no price is too high for me.

I could tell, just from skimming the letter, that this love affair had left a much deeper impression on him than I had suspected. He must have hidden some of his moods from me. I can understand that. I was only 'eccentric' then, now I am deranged, that is *was Andres*.<sup>1</sup> If this is really how it is, then a religious movement is the only thing left to him. Love thus leads a person further and further. I have often attested to what I will attest to again here: 'Existence is infinitely

<sup>1</sup> Something else entirely.

profound, and the controlling power constructs intrigues that are entirely different from any constructed by all the poets *in uno*.<sup>1</sup> This young person was constituted in such a way, and by nature so gifted, that I would have wagered he would never be caught in the net of romantic love. There are, of course, exceptions in this respect that cannot be inflected according to the normal case rules. He had an exceptional intellect, especially in terms of the size of his imagination. As soon as his creativity was awakened, he had enough for his whole life, especially if he understood himself correctly and restricted himself to that cosy domestic diversion of following the activities of the intellect and the pastimes of the imagination; which is the most perfect compensation for romantic love, does not involve love's difficulties and fatalities, and which can be described as equal to the most beautiful aspects of romantic bliss. Such a nature does not long for a woman's love, which I always think to myself must be a result of the fact that he had been a woman in an earlier life, and that he has retained the memory of this now after he has become a man. To fall in love with a girl only disturbs him and frustrates his objective, because he can almost play her part as well. This is unpleasant both for her and for himself. On the other hand, he was a very melancholy soul. Just as the former would prevent him from becoming close to a girl, so would the latter protect him if it should please some clever beauty to try to win his love. A deep melancholy of the sympathetic sort has always been a complete humiliation for all feminine wiles. If [55] a girl succeeded in drawing him to herself, the instant she began to celebrate her victory, he would think: are you not doing her an injustice, committing a sin against her by giving in to these feelings, will you not simply be in her way? Thus it is good-night to all feminine intrigue. The situation is now strangely altered. He has gone over to her side. He is more than willing to recognize all her excellent qualities, knows how to present them perhaps even better than she does herself, admires them perhaps even more than she requires. But she will never be able to bring him any further than this.

I never expected that he would have such difficulty getting over a love affair. Existence is ingenious however. What has ensnared him is not the girl's charms, but regret over having wronged her by disturbing her life. He had thoughtlessly got too close to her.

<sup>1</sup> Together.



He assures himself that love cannot be realized, that he can be happy without her, to the extent that he can be happy, especially given this new insight. But now he cannot forget that he has wronged her, as if it were wrong to break something off that cannot be completed. If he had been detached, if he had been asked: 'Here is the girl. Do you want to become close to her, to fall in love with her?' he would certainly have answered: 'Not for the whole world. I have learned what comes of that.' Such things one never forgets. This is how the situation ought to be expressed if he does not want to deceive himself. He still believes that, humanly speaking, his love cannot be realized. He has arrived at the border of the miraculous, so if it is to happen it must be by virtue of the absurd. He is not thinking at all of the difficulties, or am I so clever that I am actually inventing things here! Does he love the girl, or is she just another thing that moves him? It is unquestionably neither possession in the strict sense, nor what develops from possession, that concerns him. It is simply his return, in a purely formal sense. He would not be more disturbed if she died the next day. He would not really feel a loss, because he would essentially be at peace. The split that his encounter with her had precipitated in him would be reconciled by the fact that he had gone back to her. The girl has, again, no actuality, but is simply a reflection of, and occasion for, movements within him. The girl has enormous significance for him. He will never be able to forget her. But that through which she has significance is not herself, but her relation to him. She is like the limit of his being. But such a relation- [56] ship is not erotic. Religiously speaking, one could say that it is as if God had used this girl to capture him. And yet the girl is not herself an actuality, but is like the flies with which fishermen bait their hooks. I am completely convinced that he does not know the girl at all, despite the fact that he was attached to her and that since that time she has never been out of his thoughts. She is the girl, period. Whether, in a more concrete sense, she is this or that, attractive, lovable, faithful, self-sacrificing, someone for whom one would risk anything, move heaven and earth, does not enter his thoughts at all. If he were to give an account of the happiness, the joy, he really expects from an actual erotic relationship, he would presumably have nothing to say. What concerns him is achieved the instant he can redeem his honour and his pride! As if it were not also an issue of honour and pride to defy such childish anxieties! Perhaps he even

expects some sort of damage to his personality. This would be nothing though, if he could only get revenge on existence for mocking him by causing him to become guilty when he had been innocent, by making his relation to actuality on this point meaningless, so that he must endure being seen as a deceiver by every genuine lover! Is this not almost unbearable? But then, perhaps I do not completely understand him. Perhaps he is hiding something. Perhaps he truly loves. Then the whole thing would probably end with his killing me, since he had confided to me his most sacred thoughts. One can see that it is dangerous to be an observer. Meanwhile I wish that, purely out of an interest in human psychology, I could briefly remove the girl, get him to believe that she had married. I bet I would get a different sort of explanation, because his sympathy is so melancholy that I believe he has convinced himself out of respect for the girl that he loves her.

The problem that has confounded him is nothing more nor less than repetition. He is right not to look for clarification of this problem either in Greek or modern philosophy. The Greeks make the opposite movement. A Greek would choose to recollect without being troubled by his conscience. Modern philosophy makes no movement. In general, it merely makes a commotion. To the extent [57] that it makes a movement, it is always within the sphere of immanence. Repetition, on the other hand, is transcendence. It is good that he does not seek clarification from me, because I have abandoned my theory, the one I have been propounding. Repetition is too transcendent for me. I can circumnavigate myself, but I cannot get beyond myself. I cannot find this Archimedean point.\* My friend, fortunately, seeks no clarification, neither from some world-famous philosopher nor from some professor *publicus ordinarius*.<sup>1</sup> He seeks refuge in a private thinker who once had the world at his feet, but later withdrew from life. In other words, he seeks refuge in *Job*, who does not posture from a pulpit, attesting to the truth of his claims with comforting gesticulations, but who sits among the ashes and scrapes himself with potsherds\* while making the occasional sign or remark. He believes he has found here what he sought. In this little circle that includes Job and his wife and three friends, the truth, he

<sup>1</sup> Roughly: an assistant professor at a university.

believes, sounds more glorious and joyful and true than in a Greek symposium.\*

Even if he still sought my help, it would be for nothing. I cannot make a religious movement. It is against my nature. I do not for this reason, however, deny the reality of such a movement. Nor do I deny that one can learn a great deal from a young person. If he succeeds, he will be free of any irritation in relation to me. I cannot deny, however, that the more I think about the thing, the more I begin to think ill of the girl, that she in one way or another has allowed herself to trap him in his melancholy. If this is the case, then I would not want to be in her shoes. She will pay. Existence always wreaks the most terrible revenge on such behaviour.

15 August [58]

*My Silent Confidant!*

You will perhaps find it strange suddenly to receive a letter from one who has long been dead for you and as good as forgotten, or forgotten and as good as dead. I do not dare expect any further surprise on your part. I imagine that you will instantly recall my case, saying to yourself: right, he was the one with the unhappy love affair. Where was it we left off? Oh yes, so of course these are going to be the symptoms. There is in truth something terrible in your composure! My blood boils when I think about it, and yet I cannot tear myself loose. You have imprisoned me through some strange power. There is something indescribably soothing and beneficial in talking to you, because it is as if one were talking to oneself or to an idea. When one has expressed oneself and found solace in this release, and then suddenly sees your unaltered expression and thinks that this is a human being who is before him, an enormously intelligent person one has spoken to, then one becomes very frightened. Good God, the mourner is always slightly jealous in relation to his grief. He will not confide in just anyone. He demands silence. One can be certain enough of this with you. And yet, after one has reassured oneself of this, one becomes afraid again because your silence, which is more silent even than the grave, presumably conceals many similar confessions. You know everyone's situation, never get confused, can instantly recall another secret and begin again where you left off. Then one regrets having confided in you. Good God, the mourner

is always a little jealous of his grief. He wants the one to whom he confides it to feel its full weight and meaning. You do not disappoint because you grasp the finest nuance better than one does oneself. The next moment, this superiority that is part of knowing everything, that nothing is new or unfamiliar, drives me to despair. If I ruled over all human beings, God help you! I would lock you up with [59] me in a cage, so that you would belong only to me. And then I would presumably experience the most painful anxiety in seeing you every day. You have a demonic power that can tempt a person to want to risk everything, to want to have powers that he does not ordinarily have, which he would not otherwise desire, but desires only so long as you look at him, desires only to be thought to be something he is not, desires simply in order to purchase the indescribable rewards of that appreciative smile. I would love to spend the day with you, listen to you through the night, but when I would have to act, then I would not do it in your presence for any price. You could disturb everything with a single word. I do not have the courage to admit my weakness in front of you. If I ever did, then I would become the most cowardly person of all, because it would seem to me that I had lost everything. Thus you captivate me with an indescribable power that both frightens me and causes me to admire you. And yet sometimes it seems to me that you are deranged. Or it is not a kind of mental illness, to have subjected every passion, every movement of the heart, every mood, to the cold discipline of reflection! Is it not a kind of mental illness to be like this, an idea rather than a person, not like other people—pliant, forgiving, lost, and damned? Is it not a kind of derangement never to sleep, always to be conscious, never drowsy, never dreaming?—Right now, I do not want to see you, and yet I cannot get along without you. Therefore I write and ask that you do not inconvenience yourself by answering. Just to be safe, there is no return address on the letter. This is how I want it. This makes it safe to write to you, makes me feel secure and grateful for you.

Your plan was excellent, yes, unparalleled. I still sometimes reach out like a child toward the heroic form you once held up for my admiration with the explanation that it was my future, the heroic form that would have made me a hero if I had had the strength to don it. I was enraptured by it back then, drawn by the power of illusion into a state of complete imaginative intoxication. To determine one's entire life in such a way, for the sake of a single girl! To transform

oneself into a scoundrel, a deceiver, for the sole purpose of showing how highly one prized her, because one does not sacrifice one's honour, brand oneself a scoundrel, forfeit one's life, for something insignificant! To carry out the act of revenge in a manner more perfect than that of which the empty chatter of human beings is capable! To be a hero in such a way, not in the eyes of the world, but in one's own eyes, to be unable to appeal to human beings, living within the walls of one's own personality, to be one's own witness, one's own judge, one's own accuser, one's only accuser! To put one's future at the mercy of the onslaught of thoughts that would certainly be a consequence of such a step, with which in a way, humanly speaking, one abandons reason! To do all this for the sake of a girl! And if it could be transformed, as you suggested, into the most chivalrous and erotic compliment, one that surpassed all others, even the most fantastical exploit, precisely because one had used only oneself. This proposition made a deep impression on me. It had naturally not been said in the heat of passion—you and passion!—but coolly and reasonably, with an official knowledge obtained from a thorough perusal of the history of chivalry, undertaken precisely in order to gain such knowledge. Just as the discovery of a new category affects a thinker, so did this discovery in the realm of the erotic affect me. [60]

Unfortunately, I was not an artist with the strength or stamina for such a performance. Fortunately, I saw you infrequently and only in out-of-the-way places. If you had been by my side, you could have sat in the room, even in a corner, reading, preoccupied with something entirely unrelated, and yet, as I know only too well, and yet observing everything—I believe I would have at least begun the thing. If that had happened, it would have been terrible. Or is it not terrible, coldly and calmly, day after day, to bewitch the beloved into believing a lie! Say she had seized what means were available to her—feminine appeals; say she had beseeched me with tears in her eyes, appealed to my honour, my conscience, my happiness both in this life and the next, my temporal and eternal peace! The mere thought of it makes chills run up and down my spine.

I have not forgotten those suggestions you made that I was all too entranced to dare to oppose. 'If the girl is within her rights', you said, 'when she uses such means, then one should allow them to have an effect; what is more, one should assist her in their employment. In relation to a girl one is chivalrous enough, not only to be oneself, but

also for her sake to rise to her defence. If she is wrong to use such means, then one should simply let them slide off one's back.' This [61] is true, absolutely true, but I am not so reasonable. 'What foolish contradiction one often meets in human courage and cowardice. One fears seeing something terrible, but one has the courage to do it. You leave the girl; this is terrible. You have the courage to do this, but to see her pale, to count her tears, witness her distress, for that you have no courage. And yet this is nothing compared to the other. If you know what you want, why, and to what extent, then you ought to see, you ought to respect, every argument and not try to sneak away from them in the hope that your imagination is duller than actuality. In this respect you deceive yourself because your vibrant imagination will behave quite differently when the time comes for you to imagine her distress, than if you had seen it, had helped her to make everything as terrible and excruciating for you as possible.'

This is true, every word is true. Yet it is so cold and logical that it seems to come from the dead. It fails to convince me, to move me. I admit that I am weak, I was weak, will never be so strong or intrepid. Consider everything, imagine yourself in my place, but do not forget that you really love her as much as I loved her. I am convinced you would be victorious, you would prevail, you would overcome any fears you might have, you would fool her. What would happen? If you were not so lucky that, in the same instant that your struggles were over, your hair turned grey and your soul an hour later left your body, you would, according to your plan, have had to continue the deception. You would have succeeded. I am convinced of that. Do you not fear losing your mind? Do you not fear losing yourself in the terrible passion that is called contempt for humanity? To be right in such a way, to be faithful and yet to make oneself out to be a scoundrel, and with this deception to mock all the wretchedness of which people often boast, but to mock as well all that is good in the world. That anyone could endure such a thing! Does it not occur to you that you would have to get up often in the middle of the night and drink a glass of cold water, or sit by the side of your bed and go through it all again in your mind!

Say I had begun the plan, it would have been impossible for me to carry it through. I chose another means, left Copenhagen in the still of night for Stockholm. According to your plan, this would have

been wrong. I should have left openly. Just think if she had come out there and stood at the customs-house; it gives me chills. Imagine if I had first caught sight of her the second the engine started. I believe I would have lost my mind. I do not doubt that you would have had the strength to remain calm. If it had been necessary, if you had [62] expected her to appear at the customs-house, then you would have taken the seamstress with you. If it had been necessary, you would not only have bribed a girl, but actually seduced her, simply in order to serve the beloved. You would have seduced a girl, actually seduced, ruined, and branded her, if the situation had required it. But say you once woke suddenly in the night, and could not recognize yourself, confused yourself with the character you used for this pious deception. Because I have to admit, you certainly did not mean that one should thoughtlessly undertake such a thing. You even intimated that this method would not be necessary if the girl were not also guilty either through having been so thoughtless as to fail to notice tokens of sympathy, or so egotistical as to ignore them. But precisely this is the point—would there not come an instant when she would understand what she ought to have done, would despair over the consequences of her failure to do it, which was the result not so much of any insensitivity on her part as of the whole personality of the other? Would it then not have gone with her as it went with me? She would not have dreamed, would not have had the slightest intimation, of the powers she had unleashed, on what passions she played. Thus she became guilty in everything, despite being innocent. Would this not be too strict for her? If I had to do something here, I would rather quarrel, become angry, than issue this sort of silent, objective condemnation.

No! No! No! I could not, I cannot, I will not, not for anything would I do it. No! No! No! I could despair over these letters, which stand here next to each other as cold and indolent as idlers, the one 'No' saying no more than the others. You should hear how my passion modulates them. If only I stood next to you. If only I could tear myself away from you with my last 'No', like Don Juan from the Commandatore\* whose hand is no colder than is the reason with which you irresistibly enrapture me. Though if I stood before you, I would probably not say more than a single 'No', because before I could say anything else, you would have interrupted me with the cold answer: Yes! Yes!

What I did was more mediocre and bungling. Go ahead, laugh at me. When a swimmer, who is used to diving off the mast of a ship and doing some incredible gymnastic feat before he hits the water, [63] challenges someone else to follow his example, and this other person, instead of doing this, goes down the steps, sticks first one leg in and then the other, before finally entering the water—then I do not need to know what the first one did. I disappeared one day, without having said a word. I got on a steamship to Stockholm, fled, hid from everyone. God in heaven, help her to find some kind of explanation herself! Have you seen her—the girl I never mention by name, whose name I am not man enough to write, because my hand would tremble with terror? Have you seen her? Is she pale, or perhaps even dead? Does she grieve, has she cobbled together an explanation that is comforting to her? Does she still have a spring in her walk, or is her head bent, her form troubled? Great God, my imagination can produce everything. Are her lips pale, those lips I admired, even though I allowed myself only to kiss her hand? Is she weary and pensive, she who was happy like a child? Write, I beg you. No, do not write, I do not want any letters from you, do not want to hear about her. I believe nothing, no one, not even her. Even if she appeared before me now in the flesh, even if she were more confident than ever, it would not make me happy. I would not believe her. I would think it was a deception, designed either to mock or to comfort me. Have you seen her? No! I hope you have not permitted yourself to see her, or to interfere in my love affair. If I ever found out that you had! When a girl becomes unhappy, hungry monsters suddenly appear, monsters that want to satisfy their psychological hunger and thirst by writing novels. If I only dared to keep these flies from the fruit that was sweeter to me than everything else, more delicate and tender to look upon than a peach when, in its happiest hour, it clothes itself in the finest silk and velvet.

What do I do now? I begin again from the beginning, and thus also from the end. I flee from every external reminder of the whole thing, while my soul, day and night, waking and dreaming, continues to be obsessed with it. I never speak her name, and I thank fate for the fact that I have accidentally gained a false name. A name, my name—that really belongs to her. If only I could be rid of it. My own name is enough to remind me of everything. All of existence seems to me to contain nothing but allusions to this past. The day before



I left, I read in *Adresseavisen*,\* '16 yards of heavy, black silk for sale [64] because of change of plans'. What could have been the original purpose, perhaps a wedding dress? If only I could sell my name through the papers because of a change of plans. If some powerful spirit took my name from me and offered it back to me decorated with immortal honours, I would throw it away, cast it as far away as I could. I would beg for the most insignificant, the most meaningless name. I would ask to be called No. 14, like one of the blue boys.\* How would a name help me that was not mine, what help would a glorious name be, even if it were mine:

Because of what value is a name with glory blessed  
Compared to a sigh of love from a young girl's breast?\*

What do I do now? I sleep during the day and lie awake at night. I'm active and industrious. A model of domesticity and diligence. I moisten my hands, pump the pedal with my leg, stop the wheel, set the spindle in motion—I spin. But when, at night, I have to put the spinning-wheel away, it is not there, and only my cat knows what has become of my yarn. I am restless and active, indefatigable, but what comes of it? The peat-stamper performs miracles compared to me. In short, if you want to understand, if you want to get an impression of how fruitless is all my activity, then interpret the words of this poem as applying to my thoughts. That's all I can say:

The clouds are drifting to and fro  
They are so tired, so heavy though,  
That down they plunge, as if a wave—  
The lap of earth becomes their grave.\*

I do not need to say any more to you, or more correctly, I would need you in order to be able to say more, in order to express clearly and comprehensibly what my groping thoughts can understand only as insane.

If I actually related everything, my letter would become infinitely long, at least as long as a bad year and like the days of which it is said: I have no pleasure in them.\* I have the advantage, though, in that I can break off at any point I wish, just as I can snip the thread I spin, God willing. He who believes in existence, he has ensured that he will accomplish everything as certainly as a man hides his feelings who holds a hat without a crown before his face as he prays.

[65] Sir! I have the honour, etc.

—yes whether or not I want to, I remain

Your

*Devoted, nameless friend.*

[66]

19 September

*My Silent Confidant!*

Job! Job! O! Job! Did you really say no more than these beautiful words: the Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord?\* Were these the only words you uttered? Did you continue in all your distress only to repeat them? Why were you silent for seven days and seven nights, what was going on in your soul? When all of existence collapsed on you and lay about your feet like potsherds, did you immediately have this superhuman self-possession, did you immediately have this interpretation of love, this boldness of trust and faith? Is your door closed to one who is grief-stricken, can he expect no other relief from you than the misery offered by worldly wisdom when it gives its little speech on life's perfection? Do you have nothing else to say, do you not dare say any more than the official consolers sparingly dole out to a person, what the official consolers stiffly and ceremoniously prescribe, that in the hour of anguish it is appropriate to say, the Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away, blessed be the name of the Lord, nothing more nor less, just as one says 'bless you' to a person who sneezes! No, you who in the days of your youth\* were the sword of the oppressed and the staff of the aged and down-trodden, you did not disappoint people when everything went to pieces—then you became the voice of the suffering, and the cry of the repentant, the shriek of the fearful, and a comfort to all those silenced by pain, a faithful witness to the distress and anguish that can reside in a heart, an unfailing spokesman, who dared to complain 'in the soul's bitterness' and to battle with God. Why does one hide this? Woe unto him who consumes widows and orphans, and defrauds them of their inheritance, but woe also unto those who cunningly defraud the grief-stricken of grief's temporary comfort, to vent itself and to 'quarrel with God'. Or is the fear of God so great in our age that the grieving person no longer needs what was customary in days of old? Does one no longer dare to complain to God? Has the fear of God, or merely fear and cowardice in

general, become greater? Nowadays people believe that the genuine expression of grief, passion's despondent language, should be left to poets, who, like attorneys on behalf of a client, present the case of the sufferer before the tribunal of human sympathy. No one dares to do more than this. Speak, therefore, memorable Job! Repeat everything you said, you mighty spokesman who appears before the highest tribunal as unafraid as a roaring lion! Your speech is pithy, your heart is pious, even when you complain, when you defend your despair to your friends, your friends who, like thieves, try to overwhelm you with their speeches, even when you, provoked by your friends, trample on their wisdom, scorn their defence of the Lord as if it were a decrepit servant's or a politically savvy government official's wretched cleverness. I need you, a man who knows how to complain loudly, so that it echoes in heaven, where God consults with Satan concerning His plans for a person. The Lord has no fear of complaints. He can defend himself. But how can he defend himself when no one dares to complain as seems fitting to him. Speak, lift up your voice, speak loudly, God can always speak more loudly—after all, he has thunder. This is also an answer, an explanation, dependable, faithful, original, an answer from God himself, which, even if it crushed a person, is more glorious than gossip and rumours concerning the justice of providence, invented by human wisdom, spread by hags and half-men. [67]

My unforgettable benefactor, tormented Job! Dare I join your company, may I listen to you? Do not thrust me away, I do not stand fraudulently at your hearth, my tears are not false, even if I am able only to cry with you. Just as one who is happy seeks happiness, partakes of it, even if that which makes him happy is the happiness that is within him, so does one who grieves seek sorrow. I never owned the world, did not have seven sons and three daughters, but even one who had very little can lose everything. He can also feel as if he has lost sons and daughters, he who has lost the beloved. He can also feel as if he has been struck down with sores, he who has lost his honour and pride, and with them meaning and the will to live.

Your  
*Nameless friend.*

[68]

11 October

*My Silent Confidant!*

I cannot endure my life any longer. I loathe existence; it is insipid, without salt\* or meaning. Even if I were hungrier than Pierrot,\* I hope I would not stoop to eating the explanation people offer. One sticks his finger in the ground in order to judge where one is. I stick my finger in existence—it feels like nothing. Where am I? What is the ‘world’? What does this word mean? Who has duped me into the whole thing, and now leaves me standing there? Who am I? How did I come into the world; why was I not asked, why was I not informed of the rules and regulations, but thrust into the ranks as if I had been forced by a *Seelenverkopper*?\* How did I come to be involved in this great enterprise called actuality? Why should I be involved in it? Am I not free to decide? Am I to be forced to be part of it? Where is the manager, I would like to make a complaint! Is there no manager? To whom then shall I make my complaint? Existence is after all a debate. I would like to request that my opinion be taken into account. If one has to take existence as it is, would it not be best if one were told how it is? What does it mean: a deceiver? Does not Cicero say that one discovers deceivers by asking: *cui bono*?<sup>1</sup> I will allow anyone to ask me, and I will ask anyone myself, whether I have benefited at all from making myself and a young girl unhappy. Guilt—what is that? Is it witchcraft? Do we not know specifically how it is that a person becomes guilty? Will no one answer? Is it not crucial for all the gentlemen involved?

My mind has become paralysed; or would it be more correct to say that I have lost my mind? At one moment I am so tired, so dulled, it is as if I had died of indifference. The next moment I am raving mad, travelling from one end of the world to the other in search of someone on whom I could vent my rage. The whole of my being shrieks [69] in self-contradiction. How did it happen that I became guilty? Or am I not guilty? Why am I called guilty in every tongue? What a miserable invention is human language, which says one thing and means something else!

Has something not happened to me, was the whole thing not an event? Could I know in advance that my whole essence would undergo a change, that I would become a different person? Did something which lay hidden in my soul simply burst forth? Yet if

<sup>1</sup> Who benefits from this?

it lay hidden, how could I have foreseen its appearance? And if I could not have foreseen it, then I am innocent. If I had had a nervous breakdown, would I still have been guilty? What is the human jabbering one calls language but miserable gibberish understood only by a clique! Are dumb beasts not wiser for never speaking of such things?—Am I unfaithful? If she continued to love me, and never wanted to love another, then she would be faithful. If I continued to want to love only her, am I therefore unfaithful? We both do the same thing, how is it that I have become a deceiver because I show my fidelity with the deception? Why should she be in the right, and I in the wrong? If we are both faithful, why does human language characterize her as faithful and me as a deceiver?

Even if the whole world were against me, even if all the scholastics disputed with me, even if it meant my life, I am right. No one is going to take this from me, even if there is no language in which I can say it. I have behaved correctly. My love will not admit of expression in a marriage. If I tried, it would crush her. Perhaps this possibility seemed enticing to her. I cannot help that. It was also this way for me. The instant actuality enters in, everything is lost, then it is too late. Then actuality, in which her meaning must reside, is merely a shadow for me that runs beside my genuine intellectual actuality, a shadow that at one moment will cause me to laugh and at the next will intrude disturbingly upon my existence. It would end with my grasping her, fumblingly, as if I were grasping a shadow, or as if I stretched my hand out toward a shadow. Would her life not thus be wasted? She would become for me as if she were dead. Yes, she could actually tempt my soul to wish her dead. If I crush her, make her into something fleeting and insubstantial at precisely the moment I wanted to make her actual, instead of, on the other hand, preserving her in a true, yet in another sense apprehensive, actuality—what then? Language says that I am guilty because I should have foreseen this.

What kind of a power is it that wants to take my honour and my pride from me, and does it in such a meaningless way? Am I lost? Will I be guilty and a deceiver in whatever I do, even if I do nothing?—Or am I perhaps crazy? Then it would be best to lock me up, because human cowardice is particularly afraid of the utterances of the insane and the dying. What does that mean: crazy? What must I do in order to enjoy the respect of the bourgeoisie, to be considered intelligent? Why does no one answer? I promise a reasonable reward to anyone [70]

who comes up with a new word! I have presented the alternatives. Is there anyone so clever that he knows more than two? But if he does not know more, then is it nonsense to suggest I am crazy, faithless, and a deceiver, while the girl is faithful, reasonable, and respected? Or will it be held against me that I made the first part as beautiful as possible? Thank you very much! When I saw her joy at being loved, then I placed myself, and everything she pointed to, under the magical power of romantic love. Is it blameworthy that I was able to do this, or blameworthy that I did it? Who is guilty in this if not also she herself and some third, whose origin no one knows, that which moved me, changed me with its blow? What I have done is praised in others. — Or is it my compensation that I became a poet? I refuse all compensation. I demand my rights — i.e. my honour. I did not ask to become a poet, and would not pay this price to become one. — Or if I am guilty, then I should be able to repent of this and make it right again. Explain to me how. Should I perhaps in addition regret the fact that the world allows itself to play with me like a child with an insect? — Or is it perhaps best to forget the whole thing? To forget, I would cease to be if I forgot it. What kind of a life is it, when I have, with my beloved, lost honour and pride, and lost it in such a way that no one knows how it happened or why I can never make it right again? Must I allow myself to be snuffed out in this way? Why was I ever born then? I didn't request it.

He who is restricted to bread and water is better off than I am. My reflections are, humanly speaking, the strictest diet imaginable, and yet I feel a certain satisfaction in gesticulating my microcosmicness in as macrocosmic a manner as possible.

[71] I do not like to speak with people, but in order not to break off all communication with them, as well as to give them something more than gossip for their money, I have collected a pile of verse, pithy sayings, proverbs, excerpts from the immortal Greek and Roman authors who have been admired throughout all time. To this I have added many excellent quotations from Balle's Catechism,\* published under the auspices of the Orphan's Home. If anyone asks me anything, I have my answer ready. I can quote from the classics just as easily as Per Degn,\* and, in addition, I quote from Balle's Catechism. 'Even if we attained all the honours we could wish for, we should not allow ourselves to become arrogant or proud.' I deceive no one. How many people are there who always speak the truth, or who

always have a meaningful observation. 'The expression "the world" is generally taken to include both heaven and earth and everything found therein.'

What good would it do if I said something? There is no one who understands me. My pain and my suffering are nameless, just as I am myself, I who despite having no name, perhaps will always be something for you, and in any case remain.

*Devotedly yours*

15 November [72]

*My Silent Confidant!*

What would I do without Job! It is impossible for me to describe how complex and subtle is the meaning he has for me. I read him not as one would read some other book, with the eyes. I lay the book over my heart and read it with the heart's eye. I understand with a kind of *clairvoyance* each individual point in a unique way. Just as a child sleeps with his school-book under his pillow in order to be sure that he will remember his lessons when he wakes in the morning, so do I take the book with me to bed at night. Every word from Job is food and clothing and succour for my miserable soul. At one moment a word from him will awaken me from my lethargy, so that I face a new restlessness; the next moment it quiets my fruitless inner raging, stops the horror in the dumb qualms of passion. Have you read Job? Read it. Read it again and again. I do not have the heart to write a single one of his exclamations in a letter to you, even though it makes me happy to copy again and again what he said, first with Gothic characters and then with Latin ones, first in one format, then in another. Each copy is then laid like a poultice from the hand of God on my sick heart. And on whom was God's hand not laid but on Job? But quote him—that I cannot do, that would be to put my oar in, to want to make his words mine in the presence of another. When I am alone, then I do it, appropriate everything, but as soon as someone else is present, then I understand what young people do when old people talk.

In the whole of the Old Testament, there is no figure that one can approach with the confidence, boldness and hope of consolation with which one can approach Job, precisely because everything about him is so human, because he lies on the border of poetry. Nowhere has

[73] the passion of pain found such expression. What is Philoctetes\* with his complaints, which remain terrestrial and do not thus dismay the gods? What is Philoctetes' situation compared with Job's, where the idea is in constant motion?

Forgive me that I tell you everything. You are my confidant though, and you cannot answer. If anyone ever learned of all this, it would cause me an unbelievable amount of anguish. At night I can allow all the candles to be lit in my room, illuminating the entire house. Then I stand and read aloud, almost yelling, one or another passage from Job. Or I open my window and shout his words out into the world. If Job is a poetic figure, if there has never been a man who has spoken in such a way, then I will make his words my own and take on the responsibility for doing that. I cannot do more than that, because who is so eloquent as Job, who is in a position to improve upon anything he has said?

Even though I have read the book again and again, each time every word is new to me. Each time I come to a word, it is again made original or becomes original in my soul. I imbibe the intoxication of passion like a drunkard, gradually, until through this slow sipping I become almost insensible with inebriation. Yet I also rush toward it with indescribable impatience. Half a word, then my soul hastens into his thoughts, into his exclamations, more swiftly than a jettisoned weight sinks to the bottom of the ocean, faster than lightning seeks the rod, my soul slips in and remains there.

At other times I am quieter. I do not read, I sit sunken like an old ruin overlooking everything. Then it seems to me as if I am a little child who messes about in a room, or who sits in a corner with his toys. Then the strangest mood comes over me. I cannot understand what it is that makes adults so passionate, I cannot imagine what they quarrel about, and yet I cannot help but listen. Then I think that evil people are the source of Job's troubles, that it is his friends who now sit and bark at him. Then I sob loudly, fear for the world, and life, and people, pressing in upon my soul.

I wake and begin again with all my strength and all my heart to read him aloud. I stop suddenly. I hear nothing more, see nothing, I sense Job only in vague outline, sitting there among the ashes with his friends. No one says a word, but this silence hides a terror within it as a secret that no one dares to mention.



Then the silence is broken and Job's tormented soul breaks forth with powerful cries. These I understand. I make these words my own. In the same instant I feel the contradiction and smile at myself, as one smiles at a child who has put on his father's clothes. Or is it not something to smile at, when someone other than Job wants to say: 'Can one assert the rights of a man as against those of God, like a man can assert his rights against those of his neighbour?''\* But then fear comes over me, as if I still did not understand what I would come one day to understand, as if the horror about which I read already sat in wait for me, as if I brought it upon myself by reading about it, just as one comes to have the disease about which one reads. [74]

14 December [75]

*My Silent Confidant!*

Everything has its time, the raging fever is past, I am now like a convalescent.

The secret in the story of Job, the vital force, the core, the idea is: that Job, despite everything, is in the right. This claim makes him an exception to all human considerations; his endurance and strength prove his authority, his warrant. Every human explanation is simply a misunderstanding to him, and all his distress is to him, in relation to God, a mere sophism that he knows he cannot solve himself, but which he has confidence that God can solve. Every *argumentum ad hominem* is used against him, yet he is undaunted in his conviction. He claims that he and God are on good terms, that he knows he is innocent and pure in his innermost heart where, in addition, he knows this with God, and yet all of existence seems to refute him. This is what is great in Job, that the passion of freedom in him is not quelled or calmed through a false expression. This passion is often quelled in a person under similar circumstances, in that a faint-heartedness or trivial anxiety has allowed him to believe he suffered for the sake of his sins, when he did not do this at all. His soul lacked the endurance to think through a thought when the world thought the opposite. It can be beautiful, and true and humble, when a person thinks that he suffers misfortune because of his sins, but it can also be that he has a vague conception of God as a tyrant, which he expresses in a meaningless way in that he immediately places Him under ethical determinations.—But neither did Job become demonic in

the way a person can who, for example, wants to see God as in the right, even while believing that he is in himself in the right. It is as if he wants to show that he loves God, even while God tests him. Or he thinks that God cannot change the world just for him, but he will nevertheless be magnanimous enough to continue to love God. This is a completely demonic passion that deserves its own psychological treatment, independently of whether it humorously breaks off the [76] quarrel in order to avoid further fuss, or whether it culminates in a selfish assertion of the strength of his feelings.

Job continues to maintain that he is in the right. He does this in such a way that he demonstrates noble human boldness, which knows what a person is, that he, though delicate and quickly withered like the life of a flower, from the perspective of freedom is something great, has a consciousness that not even God, though He gave it, can wrest from him. In addition, Job maintains his claim in such a way that one sees in him the love and confidence that assures him that God can explain everything, if one can simply get Him to talk.

Job's friends give him enough to do. His dispute with them is a purgatory where the thought that he is in the right is tested. If he lacked the strength or ingenuity to try his conscience and frighten his soul, lacked the imagination to become afraid for himself, for the guilt and transgressions that might hide in the innermost reaches of his self, then his friends help him with their clear allusions, their offensive accusations, which, like envious divining-rods, are supposed to be able to call forth what lies most deeply hidden. His unhappiness is their main argument. This is how things are for them. One would think that Job would either lose his mind or collapse from misery and surrender unconditionally. Eliphaz, Bildad, Zophar, and most of all Elihu,\* who, unaffected, stands up *integer*<sup>1</sup> when the others are tired, and presents variations on the theme that his misfortune is a punishment, that he should repent, pray for forgiveness, and everything would be made right again.

Job, on the other hand, sticks to his position. His claim is like a permit with which he departs from the world and human beings. It is a demand people reject, but which Job maintains. He uses every means to persuade his friends. He tries to move them to sympathy ('have pity on me').\* He terrifies them with his voice ('you whitewash

<sup>1</sup> Still vigorous.

with lies').\* Everything is to no avail. His cries of pain become louder and louder in proportion to his friends' protests; reflection is precisely deepened in his suffering. Though this fails to move his friends, that is not important. They would gladly agree that he suffers, that he has reason to cry out, 'does the wild ass bray when he has grass?''\* but they demand that he should see that he is being punished.

How can one explain Job's claim? The explanation is this: the whole thing is a *test*. This explanation creates a new difficulty, how- [77] ever, which I have endeavoured to make clear to myself in the following way. Scholarship treats and explains existence and, in existence, the relation of human beings to God. But what discipline is of such a sort that it has a place for a relationship that is characterized as a test, which when conceived in the abstract, really is not, but is such only for the individual? There is no such discipline, and there could not be one. It would have to address how the individual would come to know that it was a test. Anyone who has any sort of conception of an existence in thought and of a being of consciousness easily sees that this is neither so easily done as said, nor so easily transcended as said, nor so easily maintained as said. The event must first be wrenched from its cosmic context and be given a religious baptism and a religious name. It must then be placed in the context of ethics, and from this comes the expression: 'a test'. Before this, the individual would not appear to exist in terms of thought. Any sort of explanation is possible and passion's vortex is unleashed. Only those who have no conception, or a worthless conception, of what it is to live by virtue of spirit are quickly finished with this problem. They console themselves with half-an-hour's reading, just as many novices in the field of philosophy offer a hastily drawn conclusion.

What is great about Job is therefore not that he said: 'The Lord gave and the Lord took away, praised be the name of the Lord', which he said at first, but did not later repeat. Job's significance is that the disputes at the boundaries of faith are fought out in him, that this tremendous insurrection of passion's desire and combative force is presented here.

Job does not, therefore, reassure like the hero of faith, but he soothes temporarily. Job is in a way the whole rich contribution from the side of human beings in the huge dispute between God and man, the extended and dreadful process that stems from the fact that Satan

placed discord between God and Job, and which ends with recognizing that the whole thing was a test.

This category — test — is neither aesthetic, nor ethical, nor dogmatic; it is completely transcendent. It is primarily knowledge about the category of a test, that something is a test, which would have a place in dogmatics. As soon as such knowledge comes into play, however, then the elasticity of the test is weakened and the category becomes something other than it was. This category is absolutely transcendent and places a person in a purely personal relation of [78] opposition to God, in such a relation that he cannot allow himself to be satisfied with a second-hand explanation.

That there are a certain number of people who have this category at hand and will pull it out on every occasion, as soon as the porridge begins to stick, shows only that they do not understand it. A person who has acquired a sophisticated understanding of the world will take an enormously long detour before he reaches it. This is the case with Job, who shows the breadth of his world-view through the firmness with which he knows how to avoid all shrewd escapes and cunning ethical exits. Job is not a hero of faith; he gives birth, in enormous pain, to the category of a 'test' precisely because he is so developed that he does not possess it in childlike immediacy.

I am aware that the purpose of such a category could be to remove and suspend all of actuality by characterizing it as a test in relation to eternity. This doubt has not, however, got the better of me, because then the test would be a *provisional* category, which would mean it was determined *eo ipso* in relation to time, and may therefore be transcended in time.

This much I see now, and since I have allowed myself to initiate you into everything, I am also writing this to you, though for myself. You know that I demand nothing of you, except that you would allow me to remain

*Devotedly yours*

[79]

13 January

*My Silent Confidant!*

The storm has blown itself out — the thunder is past — Job has been chastened before the ranks of humanity — the Lord and Job have come to an understanding, they are reconciled, 'the secret of God'

is again upon Job's tabernacle as in the days of his youth.\* People understand Job. *Now* they come and eat bread with him and sympathize with him and comfort him. His brothers and sisters each give him 'a piece of money and an earring of gold'.\* Job is again blessed: 'and the Lord gave Job *twice* as much as he had before'.\* That is what I call a *repetition*.

A thunderstorm can really do one good though! How glorious it must be to be chastened by God! It so often happens that one becomes obdurate when one is corrected, but when God judges, one loses oneself and forgets the pain in the love that wishes to educate.

Who could have thought of such an ending? And yet, no other ending is conceivable, even if this one also is inconceivable. When everything has ground to a halt, when thought ceases and speech is silenced, when explanation retreats in despair—then a thunderstorm is necessary. Who can understand this? And yet who could think of anything else?

Was Job then in the wrong? Yes, eternally, because there is no higher court before which he could come. Was he in the right? Yes, eternally, in that he was in the wrong *before God*.

So repetition is possible. But when? No human language can say. When did it happen for Job? When, from a human perspective, the impossibility was *conceived* as probable, even certain. Job gradually loses everything, and thus hope also gradually disappears in that actuality, rather than mitigating the accusations, makes increasingly harsh claims against him. Viewed immediately, everything appears to be lost. His friends, especially Bildad, know of only one escape: he must submit to the punishment, daring to hope for a repetition to the point of excess. But Job does not want to do this. Thus the knot, the [80] tangle, is tightened. Only a thunderstorm can loosen it.

This tale is indescribably comforting to me. Was it not fortunate that I did not follow your clever, admirable plan? Perhaps from a human perspective it was cowardly of me, but perhaps it will be easier this way for providence to help me.

There is only one thing I regret, that I did not ask the girl to give me my freedom. I am convinced she would have done it. Who can grasp a girl's magnanimity? And yet, I cannot really regret it because I know that I did not ask this because I respected her too much.

What would I have done without Job! I will not say any more for fear of burdening you with my eternal refrain.

*Devotedly yours.*

[81]

17 February

*My Silent Confidant!*

Here I sit, pleading innocence (as one would say in the language of thieves) or by the king's pleasure? I do not know. The only thing I know is that I sit, that I do not move from my place. Here I am, at the peak or at the foot? I do not know. All I know is that I have been here in *suspense gradu*<sup>1</sup> for a whole month without moving a foot, or indeed, making the slightest movement.

I wait for a thunderstorm—and for a repetition. And yet, if only a thunderstorm would come, I would be indescribably happy, even if my sentence were that repetition was impossible.

What would be the effect of this thunderstorm? It would make me fit to be a husband. It would destroy my whole personality, I would be finished. It would make it so that I would hardly know myself. I do not waver, even though I stand on one leg. My honour would be saved, my pride redeemed and however it might change me, I hope the recollection will remain with me as an inexhaustible comfort, remain after it has happened. What I fear is, in a sense, worse than suicide because it is going to disturb me in an entirely different way. If the thunderstorm does not come, then I remain deceitful. I do not die, but only make myself out to be dead so that my friends and family can bury me. After I have been laid in my coffin, then I will quietly embrace my expectation. No one will know of this, because otherwise they would be afraid to bury a man in whom there was still life.

I do everything in my power to transform myself into a husband. I sit and pare myself down, remove all the incommensurable in order to become commensurable. Each morning I lay aside my soul's impatient and infinite striving, but to no avail, for in the next instant it is there again. Each morning I shave myself to make myself presentable, but to no avail, the next morning my beard is back. I

[82] recall myself as banks recall their notes in order to put new ones into

<sup>1</sup> Immobilized.

circulation, but it does not work. I convert all my intellectual property, my mortgage into conjugal currency — alas, alas, my wealth is worth very little in this coin!

I realize my account here is brief. My situation does not allow me many words.

*Devotedly yours.*

Despite the fact that I long ago renounced the world and abandoned all theorizing, I cannot deny that my interest in this young person drew me, to some extent, out of my pendular movements. It was easy to see that he laboured under a complete misunderstanding. What he suffers from is a misplaced melancholy magnanimity whose only place is in a poet's brain. He waits for the thunderstorm that will transform him into a husband, a nervous breakdown perhaps. He has got it all wrong. He is one of those people who says: 'About face' to the whole battalion, instead of turning around himself, which can be expressed here as: 'The girl must go.' If I were not so old I would enjoy the pleasure of taking the girl myself, if only to help the man. [83]

He is pleased that he did not follow my 'clever' plan. That is just like him. Even now, he cannot see that that would have been the only right thing to do. One cannot really engage him. It is fortunate, therefore, that he does not want me to answer his letters. Corresponding with a person who has such a trump card as a thunderstorm in his hand would be laughable. If only he had my intelligence. That is all I am going to say on the matter. If he, when what he had calculated would happen did happen, would give it a religious expression, that is his business. I have no objection to that. But it is always good to have done everything that human sagacity can prescribe. It should have been me. I could have been more help to the girl. Now it is going to be much harder for her to forget him. It is unfortunate that she did not come to the point of screaming. There should be screaming, it is beneficial, just as is bleeding with a contusion. One must allow a girl to scream, to get it out of her system. She will forget faster that way.

He failed to follow my advice and now, presumably, she sits and grieves. I understand that this is extremely serious for him. If there were a girl who would be faithful to me in this way, then I would fear her more than anything in the world, more than lovers of freedom [84] fear a tyrant. She would be a source of constant anxiety. She would

be like a sore tooth of which I was aware at every instant. She would cause me anxiety because she would be an ideal, and I am too proud to endure that another human being could be stronger and more enduring in that sense than I. If she remained at the pinnacle of the ideal, then I would find that my life, instead of going forward, would exist *in pausa*.<sup>1</sup> Perhaps if someone could not endure this painful admiration she extorted from him and became jealous, he would employ all possible means to topple her: marriage.\*

Even if she said, as is often said and read and forgotten and repeated, 'I have loved you, I will confess now' ('*now*', despite the fact that she has presumably already said it hundreds of times); 'I have loved you more than God' (this is not often said... especially not in our God-fearing age, where the fear of God is actually an even rarer phenomenon)—it would not disturb him. The ideal is not to die of grief, but to preserve oneself healthy and, if possible, happy, and yet also to preserve one's feelings. To accept another is no virtue. It is a weakness, a very simple and plebeian virtuosity which only the bourgeoisie would sound an alarm about. Anyone with an artistic view of life easily sees that this is a mistake that cannot be corrected, even if one married seven times.

He regrets that he did not ask her for his freedom. He could save himself that trouble. It would not have helped much. He would, in all probability, simply have given her ammunition to use against him, because genuinely to request his freedom is quite different from crediting her with being his muse. One sees again here that he is a poet. A poet is born to be a fool for girls. Even if the girl had made a fool of him right in front of his face, he would have believed it was high-mindedness. He is much better off thanking his lucky stars he did not do that. She would then presumably really have become serious. She would then not simply have manipulated the little multiplication table of the erotic, which is of course legitimate and her right, but also the larger table of marriage. She would have had God vouch for her, called on all that was holy, seized every one of his precious memories. In this respect, many girls will, when the opportunity presents itself, make unabashed use of a falsehood that [85] not even a seducer would allow himself to use. Whoever, in the context of the erotic, calls on God's help and wants to be loved for God's

<sup>1</sup> In a stationary state.



sake ceases to be himself and strives to be stronger than heaven and more meaningful than eternal salvation.— Assume the girl had done this, he would perhaps never have forgotten it, never have recovered from it, since he presumably would have been so chivalrous as not to listen to a single reasonable word from me, but would have taken every outburst from her at face value and preserved it as an eternal truth. Assume that afterwards it would have become apparent that the whole thing had been an exaggeration, a little lyrical impromptu, an emotional *divertissement*... Now what! But then perhaps his high-mindedness would also have helped him here.

My friend is a poet, and the fanatical belief in the feminine ideal is essential to poets. I am, respectfully, a writer of prose. I have my own opinions concerning the opposite sex, or more correctly, I have no opinions because I very seldom have seen a girl whose life could be grasped in an intellectual category. Girls normally lack the coherence that is necessary in order for one to either admire or despise a person. A woman is self-deceived even before she deceives anyone else, and therefore one lacks any standard by which to measure her.

My young friend will see. I have no confidence in his thunderstorm. I believe he would not have acted badly had he followed my advice. The idea was in motion in the young man's love. This was the reason I became involved with him. The plan I suggested used the idea as a yardstick. That is the most reliable yardstick in the world. If one employs it consistently throughout life, then anyone who would deceive one becomes himself a fool. The idea had taken aim. In my mind, that was the fault of both himself and his beloved. If she were capable of living in this way, a way that required no extraordinary abilities, but simply inwardness, then in the same instant that he left her she would have said to herself: 'I will have nothing more to do with him. It does not matter if he was a deceiver or not, if he should come back or not. I will preserve the ideality of my own love. That, I will certainly know how to honour.' If she had done that, my friend's position would have been painful enough, because then he would have remained in sympathetic pain and distress. But who would not want to be in such a position, when in the midst of his grief he had the joy of admiring his beloved? His life would have halted like hers, but it would have halted as a river halts, bewitched by the power of music.— If she were unable to use the idea as regulative for her life, [86]

then his pain would not have interfered with her use of another mode of advance.

[87]

31 May

*My Silent Confidant!*

She is married, to whom I do not know, because when I read it in the newspaper I felt as if I had been struck and I dropped the paper. Since then I have not been able to bring myself to take a closer look at the announcement. I am back to my old self. This is a repetition. I understand everything, and existence seems more beautiful than ever. So there was a thunderstorm, even if it was caused by her high-mindedness. Whoever it is she has chosen—I will not say ‘preferred’, because in terms of the qualities required of a husband, anyone would be preferable to me—she has been magnanimous toward me. Even if he were the handsomest man in the world, the very ideal of masculine perfection, able to enchant any girl, even if she could bring the whole feminine sex to the point of despair by agreeing to marry him, she has behaved magnanimously, if in no other respect, at least to the extent that she has completely forgotten me. What is as beautiful as feminine generosity? Terrestrial beauty may wither, the sparkle in her eye may one day be extinguished, she may become bent and stooped with the years, her locks may lose their power to ensnare when they are hidden by a matronly cap, her regal glance, that ruled the world, may one day shrink to one of maternal concern for her small brood—a girl who has been magnanimous in this way will never age. Let existence reward her as it has, let it give her what she loved more; it has also given me what I loved more—myself; and it gave me this through the agency of her magnanimity.

I am back to my old self. This ‘self’, which another would not pick up off the street,\* is mine again. The schism in my being has been removed. I am whole again. The anxieties of sympathy, which my pride nourished and supported, no longer force splits and separations.

[88] Is repetition not possible? Have I not received everything back, only doubled? Have I not myself again, and in such a way that I have a double appreciation of what this means? And what is a repetition of worldly goods, which have no meaning in relation to spiritual

matters, compared to such a repetition? Only Job's children were not returned to him twofold, because a human life does not allow itself to be doubled in this way. Here only a spiritual repetition is possible, even though it cannot be so complete temporally as in eternity where there is true repetition.

I am myself again. The machinery has been set in motion. The traps in which I had been caught have been hewn asunder. The magic spell that had been placed on me so that I could not come to my senses has been broken. No one raises his hand against me now, my freedom has been secured, I am born again to myself, because as long as Ilithyia\* folds her hands the one who is in labour cannot give birth.

It has passed, my yawl is afloat. In the next minute I will be back to the place of my soul's craving, there where ideas effervesce with elemental force, where thoughts are as deafening as migrating nations, there where at other times it is calm, as still as the silent South Sea depths, a stillness where one hears oneself speak, even if the movement takes place only within, there where one ventures one's life every minute, every minute loses it, and then wins it back again.

I belong to the idea. When it beckons me, I follow. When it summons me, then I wait day and night. No one calls to dinner, no one waits supper on me. When the idea calls, I leave everything, or more correctly, I have nothing to leave. I disappoint no one, distress no one, by being true to it. My spirit is not distressed by having to distress another. When I return home, there is no one to read anything in my face, no one to grill me, no one to worm an account out of me, which I would not be able to give anyone anyway, of whether I am happy or sunk in misery, of whether I have been victorious in life or been vanquished by it.

I am again handed intoxication's beaker. I can already catch its fragrance, sense its bubbling music. But first, a toast to her who saved my soul that had sat in the loneliness of despair: praised be feminine magnanimity! Long live thought's flight, long live mortal danger in the service of the idea, long live the misery of battle, long live the festive shouts of victory, long live dancing in the eddy of the infinite, long live the wave that drives me down into the abyss, long live the wave that slings me up again over the stars.

[89]

To:

Mr. X, Esq.

the real reader of this book

[91]

Copenhagen, August 1843

*My Dear Reader!*

Forgive me for speaking confidentially to you, but we are *unter uns*.<sup>1</sup> Despite the fact that you are an imaginary person, you are in no way a multiplicity, but only one, so there is only you and I.

If one assumes that everyone who reads a book for some contingent reason having nothing to do with the book's content is not a genuine reader, then there would not be many genuine readers left, even for authors with a large readership, because to whom would it occur in our day to waste an instant on the ludicrous thought that to be a good reader is actually an art, let alone to spend time to become such a reader? This unfortunate situation naturally influences an author, who according to my opinion does well to write after the fashion of Clemens Alexandrinus,\* in such a way that heretics cannot understand it.

A curious female reader, who reads the end of every book on her night table in order to see if the lovers are finally united, will be disappointed because, although two lovers are united, my friend, who is also a man, is not one of them. Since this is apparently not the result

<sup>1</sup> There are only the two of us.

of some minuscule contingency, then the case becomes significant for girls who are both ready and eager to marry and who, by having to cross off a single eligible man, make this prospect less probable.—A concerned father may fear that his son will go the same way as my friend, and thus be of the opinion that the book does not make a good impression, in that it does not provide a ready-made uniform that would fit any musketeer.—An ephemeral genius will perhaps find that the exception creates far too many problems for himself and takes the situation much too seriously.—An amiable family friend will search in vain for an explanation of the trivialities of the parlour or a glorification of tea-party gossip.—A realist would perhaps think the whole thing a lot of to do about nothing.—A woman experienced in matchmaking would judge the book to be flawed, in that the most interesting issue was the determination of what qualities would be required of a girl in order for her to be able ‘to make such a man happy’, because she reassures herself that it stands to reason that such a girl must exist, or at least must have existed.—A parish priest will proclaim that there is too much philosophy in the book; the more reflective bishop will seek in vain that of which the contemporary congregation is in such great need, the genuinely speculative.—My dear reader, we can certainly talk about this *unter uns*, because you can understand that I do not mean to suggest that all these opinions will actually be held by anyone, since the book will not have many readers. [92]

The book will possibly provide a welcome occasion for an ordinary reviewer to demonstrate in detail that it is neither a comedy, tragedy, novel, epic, epigram, nor novella. He will also find it unforgivable that one searches in vain for a 1. 2. 3. development.\* He will find the actual development difficult to understand, because it is inverse. It is not addressed to him, in any case, because reviewers generally explain existence as follows: both the universal and the particular are annihilated. Most importantly, however, it is too much to expect of an ordinary reviewer that he should have any interest in the dialectical battle through which the exception emerges from the universal,\* the extended and incredibly complicated procedure through which the exception fights for and asserts its legitimacy, because the illegitimate exception is recognizable in that it wants to bypass the universal. This conflict is very dialectical and infinitely complex. It assumes an absolute proficiency in the dialectic of the universal,

demands speed in the imitation of the movements, it is, in a word, as difficult as killing a man while letting him live. On the one side is the exception, on the other side the universal, and the struggle is itself a strange conflict between the impatience and anger of the universal in relation to the spectacle the exception causes, and its besotted infatuation with the exception; because the universal delights in the exception to the same extent that heaven delights in the reformed sinner—more than in ninety-nine righteous souls. On the other side is the resistance and defiance of the exception, its weakness and infirmity. The whole thing is a rupture, in which the universal breaks with the exception, breaks with it violently, and strengthens [93] it with this rupture. If the exception cannot endure the anguish, the universal will not help it, just as heaven will not help a sinner who cannot endure the pains of repentance. The vigorous and determined exception which, despite its struggle with the universal, is an offshoot of it, preserves itself. The relationship is this: the exception grasps the universal to the extent that it thoroughly grasps itself. It works for the universal in that it works through itself. It explains the universal in that it explains itself. The exception thus explains the universal and itself, and when one really wants to study the universal, one need only examine a legitimate exception, because it will present everything much more clearly than the universal would itself. The legitimate exception is reconciled with the universal; the universal is at its basis polemically opposed to the exception. It will not reveal its infatuation with the exception until the exception forces it to do so. If the exception does not have the strength to do this, then it is not legitimate, and it is therefore very shrewd of the universal not to reveal anything too quickly. If heaven loves a sinner more than ninety-nine righteous souls, the sinner does not know this in the beginning; on the contrary, he senses only heaven's wrath, until he finally, in a sense, forces heaven to speak.

Over time, one tires of the interminable chatter about the universal and the universal, which is repeated until it becomes boring and vapid. There are exceptions. If one cannot explain them, then neither can one explain the universal. One generally fails to notice this, because one does not normally grasp the universal passionately, but only superficially. The exception, on the other hand, grasps the universal with intense passion.

When one does this, a new order of precedence emerges, and the poor exception, if it is ever any good, appears again, as the poor step-daughter in the fairy tale, restored to a position of honour.

A poet is such an exception. He serves as a transition to the genuinely aristocratic exceptions, the religious exceptions. A poet is generally an exception. One is generally grateful for such a person and his productions. I have thought myself that it could be very valuable to allow such a thing to come into being. The young person I have allowed to come into being is a poet. More than this I cannot do, because the most I can do is to conceive of a poet and present him through my thoughts. I cannot become a poet myself. My interest lies in another direction. My concern in this project has been purely aesthetic and psychological. I have included myself, but when you, dear reader, look closely, you will easily see that I am only an assisting spirit and far from being what the young person fears; I am actually indifferent to him. This was a misunderstanding that I occasioned as a means of presenting him more clearly. Every movement I made was made simply in order to illuminate him. I have had him constantly *en mente*,<sup>1</sup> every word I wrote was either ventriloquism or said in relation to him. Even where humour and flippancy seem to be tossed about without reference to anything in particular, it was with reference to him. Even when everything ends sadly, there is a gesture to him, to something in him. For this reason, all the movements are purely lyrical, and what I say one can see only darkly in him,\* or through what I say one will be better able to understand him. Thus have I done for him what I could, just as I now endeavour to serve you, dear reader, by again being another. [94]

The life of a poet begins in a struggle with all of existence. The point is to find something reassuring, or legitimizing, because he must always lose the first struggle. He is not justified in wanting to win immediately. My poet finds a justification in that existence absolves him in that instant when he wishes, in a sense, to destroy himself. His soul then wins a religious resonance. This is what actually sustains him, despite the fact that it never breaks through. His dithyrambic joy in the last letter is an example of this, because this joy is unquestionably based on a religious attunement which remains, however, hidden in him. He has a religious attunement

<sup>1</sup> In mind.

like a secret he cannot explain, even while this secret helps him to explain actuality poetically. He explains the universal as repetition, and yet he understands repetition in another way himself, because while actuality becomes repetition, for him the exponential power of his consciousness is repetition. He has had, what belongs essentially to a poet, a love affair; but this is equivocal: happy, unhappy, comic, tragic. In relation to the girl, everything appears comical, because he was presumably affected sympathetically in such a way that his suffering lay largely in the suffering of the beloved. If he was mistaken in this, then the situation appears comical. If he considers himself, then [95] the situation appears tragic, just as it does when, in another sense, he considers the beloved ideally. He has preserved an ideal picture of the whole love affair, to which he can give whatever expression he wishes, but only in terms of a mood, because he has no facticity. He has a consciousness-fact, or more correctly, he has no consciousness-fact, but a dialectical elasticity that allows him to produce moods. While this productivity becomes his outward appearance, he is carried by something ineffably religious. Thus was the movement in the earlier letters, especially in certain of them, much closer to a genuine religious event, but the instant the temporary tension is relieved, he comes back to himself, but as a poet, and the religious is driven underground—i.e. becomes like an ineffable substratum.

If he had had a more devoutly religious background, he would not have become a poet. Then everything would have received a religious meaning. The situation in which he had become ensnared would definitely have been significant for him, but then the hesitation would have had a higher source; he would also then have had an entirely different authority, though it would have been purchased with even more painful suffering. He would then have acted with an entirely different iron-like consistency and firmness. He would have gained a fact of consciousness he could have stuck with, and which would never have been equivocal to him, but pure seriousness, because he would have established it himself by virtue of a relationship to God. In the same instant the whole question of finitude would become insignificant; genuine actuality would, in a deeper sense, make no difference to him. He would have religiously exhausted every possible horrific consequence of the situation. Whether things turned out to be other than he had thought would not disturb him at all. Even if the worst had happened, this could not have frightened



him any more than it already had. He would, with religious fear and trembling, but also with faith and confidence, understand what he had done from the beginning, and what he was as a result obligated to do later, even if this obligation occasioned something strange.\* It is characteristic of this young person that, as a poet, he can never fully understand what it is he has done, precisely because he will both see it and yet not see it in the external and visible, or will see it in the external and visible, and therefore will see it and not see it. [96] A religious individual, on the other hand, rests in himself and does not take seriously the childish pranks of actuality.

My dear reader! You will understand now that what is of interest here is the young person, while I pale into insignificance, just as a woman giving birth does in relation to the child she delivers. Thus it is with me, because I have in a way delivered him, and as the elder, I am allowed to speak. My personality is a presupposition of consciousness, which must be present in order to force him out, whereas my personality could never come to the place where he arrives, because the primitive simplicity in which he appears is the important thing. He has therefore, from the beginning, been in good hands, even though I frequently had to tease him out in order that he should be visible. I saw he was a poet when I first laid eyes on him, if for no other reason than that an event which, had it happened to a more superficial person, would in time have become nothing, for him expanded into an earth-shaking event.

Despite the fact that it is generally I who am speaking, you, my dear reader (you have a good understanding of intimate psychological states and emotions, and it is for this reason that I call you 'dear'), you will read about him everywhere. You will understand the variety of the transitions, even if now and then, when the mood suddenly showers down upon you and makes you feel peculiar, you will see afterwards how everything was modified, the one mood in relation to the other, together with the fact that the individual mood is essentially correct, which is the most important thing, since the lyrical is so important here. You might once let yourself be distracted by an apparently pointless joke or purposeless threat, but afterwards you will perhaps reconcile yourself with it.

Your devoted  
*Constantine Constantius*

## REPETITION

*TITLE PAGE:* earlier subtitles to the text included 'A Fruitless Venture' and 'A Venture (or Essay) in Experimental Philosophy'. Kierkegaard used pseudonyms to distance himself from his writing, and to frustrate any attempt to discover the meaning of a text by looking into his biography. He is playfully revealing in his choice of pseudonyms. The name Constantine Constantius, or 'Constant Constant', affirms repetition (a kind of change) *and* constancy.

- 2 *epigraph:* from the *Heroicus* ('On Heroes') of the Greek writer Flavius Philostratus, born *c.*AD 170. Kierkegaard refers to his *Life of Appolonius of Tyana* in *Philosophical Crumbs* (see note to p.161).
- 3 *Eleatics:* school of Greek philosophers associated with Zeno of Elea (born *c.*490 BC), who was famous for such constructed abstract paradoxes as that motion is impossible. The paradox is 'refuted' here by the founder of the Cynics, Diogenes (*c.*400–*c.*325 BC).

*Leibniz:* the eighteenth-century German philosopher claimed that the present contained the future within itself: the future, then, is a 'replay' or 'repetition' of (some aspect of) the present.

*one author:* the author is Kierkegaard himself. Against the view that a love that has gone by is therefore 'unhappy', Constantine alludes to a view contained in the first volume of *Either/Or*, in the 'Diapsalmata', to the effect that in this sad life the *only* happiness comes through memory—nothing stays with us long enough in the present to give happiness.

- 5 *Farinelli:* the famous *castrato* singer (1705–82); the reference here is to the opera *Farinelli*, by the Danish composer J. L. Heiberg (1837), in which he is portrayed as the only person able to distract the Spanish king Philip V from his depression.

- 7 *Møller*: Poul Martin Møller (1794–1838) was Kierkegaard's friend and professor.  
*There comes a dream ... golden hair*: from Møller's poem 'Den gamle Elsker' (The Old Lover). The last line literally translates as: 'You sun of women!' I have taken the liberty of changing the line in order to preserve the rhyme of the original.
- 8 *Strandveien*: a coastal road near Copenhagen.
- 11 *Stadsgraven*: the moat around Copenhagen.
- 12 *Lessing giving . . . birth*: in the *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* Climacus praises the eighteenth-century German writer G. E. Lessing for always seeking the truth, and having less interest in available finished truths (as if truth were best as it is being born) and as a Socrates might seek to bring it to birth in his interlocutors. Climacus quotes Lessing as saying: 'If I had to choose between the truth in God's right hand, and the search for truth in His left hand, I'd choose the left hand.' (*Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, ed. and trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 106.)
- 14 *Elvira*: in Mozart's opera *Don Giovanni*, Donna Elvira is abandoned by the great seducer, yet she never gives up hope that he might reform and return to her. Kierkegaard loved the opera, attending a Copenhagen production several times, and wrote a long essay on it in the first volume of *Either/Or*.
- 16 *disappearance*: this was originally his 'death'. Kierkegaard apparently changed 'death' (*Død*) to 'disappearance' (*Forsvinden*) after learning of his former fiancée's engagement. *SKS* has *Forvinden* ('recovery') rather than *Forsvinden*. As there is no editorial explanation for the change from the 1843 first-edition printing of *Forsvinden*, this appears to be an error in *SKS*.
- 18 *Heracitus*: Presocratic Greek philosopher, known for his view that everything is flux, nothing eludes change. For the Eleatics see note to p. 3 above.  
*Mediation*: a term common among Hegelian philosophers, referring to the view that a reconciliation or negotiation (mediation) among opposite forces is the engine of change, whether in debates or in personal development or in historical transitions. Constantine will suggest that neither mediation nor Greek recollection captures the essence of the sort of movement or change he calls 'repetition'.
- 19 *ethnic view*: Constantine needs a general contrast to 'modern', and uses 'ethnic' for a 'pre-Christian view, a viewpoint that we might call 'traditional' or 'historically-conventional' or even 'tribal' (in some very broad sense).  
*mit mancherlei . . . argumentire*: [I] express myself in various tongues, chattering away in the language of sophists, the puns of Cretans and Arabs, of whites, Moors and Creoles, a combination of criticism, mythology, *rebus*, and axioms, arguing now in a human, now in an extraordinary way.' From a letter of the German philosopher J. G. Hamann (1730–88) to J. G. Linder.

*Professor Ussing*: Tage Algreen Ussing (1797–1872) was a liberal politician and a professor of law at the University of Copenhagen.

*28th of May Society*: society formed to commemorate the introduction, on 28 May 1831, of the new ordinances on the Estates of the Realm.

- 20 *Molbos*: inhabitants of the Jutland peninsula of Mols, just north of Zealand. The Molbos are the butt of many Danish jokes.

*coupé*: a small section of a carriage, usually seating only two persons.

*postillion*: a coachman who rides the lead horse.

- 22 *marriage*: Kierkegaard discusses ‘the aesthetic validity of marriage’—roughly, the question whether, apart from any moral or religious validity to marriage, there might be a beautiful or pleasing aspect to it, in his *Either/Or*, published a few months earlier.

- 23 *Tunnel*: a rail tunnel under the Thames had just been completed in 1843.

*for amusement*: the Royal Theatre in Copenhagen had a banner over the stage reading ‘Not for Pleasure Only’.

*Lars . . . Kehlet*: two popular Copenhagen restaurants.

*der Talisman*: famous farce by the Viennese playwright Johann Nepomuk Nestroy that opened in 1843.

- 27 *Nürnberg print*: popular coloured woodcuts, produced in Germany. There are allusions to such prints in Kierkegaard’s later works, *Practice in Christianity* and *Sickness Unto Death*.

*entrechat*: a ballet leap in which the dancer ‘flutters’ her (or his) feet while aloft. In *Fear and Trembling* Kierkegaard’s pseudonym Johannes de Silentio contrasts ‘the knight of faith’ and ‘the knight of infinite resignation’ in terms of the capacity of each to complete a ballet leap gracefully.

- 28 *The orchestra and the first balcony*: these were the most expensive seats, and would generally have been occupied by a more cultured audience than one would find in the cheaper seats.

*Cimbrian-Teutonic*: Celtic or Germanic peoples, in this context, crude and ‘uncivilized’.

- 30 *Chodowiecki*: the German illustrator Daniel Chodowiecki (1726–1801) produced engravings for a satirical version of Virgil’s *Aeneid* that Kierkegaard owned. One depicted the founding of Rome.

- 31 *Socrates . . . nature*: in Plato’s *Phaedrus* (229e–230a), Socrates wonders (perhaps ironically) whether he is a human being (with a more or less stable essence) or instead a changeable sea-monster like Typhon. The wording here is from *The Collected Dialogues of Plato*, ed. Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961).

*Beckmann and Grobecker*: Friederich Beckmann (1803–66) and Phillipe Grobecker (1815–83) were leading actors at the Königstädter in the early 1840s.

- 31 *Baggesen*. . . . *Sara Nickles*: Jens Immanuel Baggesen (1764–1826) was a Danish poet and literary figure. Baggesen is considered important in the transition from the Enlightenment to the Romantic period. Sara Nickles is a character who appears in Act 5 of *Ludlams Hule*, an opera by the Danish poet and literary figure Adam Oehlenschläger (1779–1850). This remark was made by Baggesen in a review of Oehlenschläger's opera.
- 32 *Even Dr Ryge* . . . *an effect*: allusion to two actors well-known at the time, and to J. L. Heiberg's vaudeville, *King Solomon and Jörgen the Hatter*.  
*Münchhausen-like*: Baron von Münchhausen, notorious for his tall tales, claimed that once when he fell in a bog he rescued himself by hauling himself up by his own coat collar (or hair, or bootstraps).  
*Dyrhavesbakken*: a popular amusement park just outside of Copenhagen.
- 37 *friendship*: the poet in question, who writes on coffee and friendship, is Johannes Ewald, referring to his '*Paaskrift paa en Kaffeekande*' (Recipe on a Coffeepot).
- 38 *every head*: for Proserpina's plucking hair, see Virgil, *Aeneid*, 4. 698–9.  
*woman* . . . *dripping*: Proverbs 19: 13.  
*Unter den Linden*: Berlin's main thoroughfare.  
*beadle*: sexton or church officer charged with keeping order.  
*Kerner tells somewhere*: the story comes from the German poet and medical writer Justinus Kerner, *Eine Erscheinung aus dem Nachtgebiete der Natur* (An Apparition from Nature's Nocturnal Realms) (1836).
- 39 *Gronmeyer the businessman*: character in a play by J. L. Heiberg, *Kjøge Huuskors* (Domestic Troubles in Kjøge).  
*faithlessly* . . . *repetition*: Kierkegaard makes a word-play here. The Danish for repetition is '*gentagelse*', or to 'take again', so the first two italicized words are *tag* and *igen*. The italics are Kierkegaard's.
- 41 *summing up*: Kierkegaard quotes Shakespeare from his Danish version of Schegel and Tieck's German translation: 'en Øltappers Regnekunst var tilstrækkelig for at opsummere dem'. Shakespeare's words are 'a tapster's arithmetic may soon bring his particulars therein to a total'. *Troilus and Cressida*, 1. ii.  
*passed*: here in the sense in which it is used in card games.  
*life is a stream*: another allusion to Heraclitus' view of life as flux (see note to p. 18 above).
- 42 *The little nun* . . . *heart*: this poem appears in the original text in German:

Das Nönnlein kam gegangen  
 In einem schneeweißen Kleid;  
 Ihr Häärl war abgeschnitten,  
 Ihr rother Mund war bleich.  
 Der Knab, er setzt sich nieder,  
 Er saß auf einem Stein;  
 Er weint die hellen Thränen,  
 Brach ihm sein Herz entzwei.

*post-horn*: the driver of a mail coach would announce the mail's arrival by blowing a flourish on his horn.

*everything . . . passes away*: Ecclesiastes 1.

*post-chaise*: A horse-drawn carriage for carrying mail. Constantine is intrigued by the fact that a postal carriage is always on the move, but that it also predictably (and boringly) returns.

- 43 *πεισιθάνατος*: the philosopher Hegesias of Cyrene c.300 BC (nicknamed *Peisithanatos*, 'The Death-Persuader'), believed that no complete happiness exists, and thus counselled suicide. In one book, he suggests self-starvation.

- 44 *Domitian*: emperor of Rome, AD 81–96.

- 45 *Eleusinian mysteries*: rites of initiation held in Ancient Greece from c.1700 BC on into the Hellenistic era, performed in honour of Demeter and Persephone, and of great cultural-religious significance.

*Demonax . . . defence*: according to the dialogue on him by Lucian, the Greek philosopher Demonax (c.AD 70–170) defended his failure to be initiated into the Eleusinian mysteries by saying that if the mystries were of no value then no one needed them, but if they were true then everyone should know them.

- 47 *eschatologist . . . Lucian*: an eschatologist writes about 'first and last things', for instance, about the afterlife. Aristophanes, the Greek comic playwright, wrote about the land of the dead in *The Frogs*, and the Roman-Syrian satirist Lucian (c.AD 125–80) wrote a series of *Dialogues of the Dead*. *Doctores cerei* is a medieval term referring to scholars given an honorary degree by papal dispensation ('with a wax seal'), without having to defend a thesis, i.e. second-rate or spurious scholars.

- 50 *Archimedean point*: Archimedes, (c.250 BC), the Greek mathematician and physicist, proposed that if he had a long enough lever, and a steady 'point' or fulcrum to rest it on, he could lift the world.

scrapes himself with potsherds: Job 2:8.

- 51 *Job . . . Greek symposium*: the most famous Greek symposium ('drinking-party') is the one related in Plato's dialogue of that name, in which Socrates and others give speeches on the nature of love. Constantine is contrasting the young man's attraction to the model of insight found in the Book of Job to a Greek model.

- 55 *Don Juan . . . Commandatore*: in Mozart's opera *Don Giovanni*, the statue of the Commandatore, murdered by Don Giovanni, appears in the last act in order to drag him to hell. The Don tears himself away from the cold hand of the Commandatore with a defiant 'No!'

- 57 *Adresseavisen*: newspaper composed of classified advertisements.

*blue boys*: orphans in the Royal Orphanage established in 1753 in Copenhagen, so called because of the blue outfits they received at confirmation.

*Because of what value . . . from a young girl's breast*: from the poem 'Elskovsbaalet' (Love's Fire) by the Danish poet Schak von Staffeldt.

I have taken some liberties here in order to preserve the rhyme of the original. A more literal translation would be: 'What is the adulation that comes with a famous fame, compared to a sigh of love from a young girl's breast?' Even this is not as faithful to the original as is possible though, because a faithful translation of *Navnkundighed* (i.e. 'renown', 'celebrity', or 'fame') would lose the allusion to 'name' (i.e. the *Navn* of *Navnkundighed*).

- 57 *The clouds . . . grave*: from the poem 'Der ewige Jude,' (The Wandering Jew), by the German poet Wilhelm Müller. This poem appears in the original text in German:

Die Wolken treiben hin und her,  
Sie sind so matt, sie sind so schwer;  
Da stürzen rauschend sie herab,  
Der Schoos der Erde wird ihr Grab.

*no pleasure in them*: Ecclesiastes 12: 1.

- 58 *name of the Lord*: Job 1: 21.

*days of your youth*: Job 29.

- 60 *salt*: Mark 9: 50.

*Pierrot*: sad clown, a stock figure of the Commedia dell'Arte.

*Seelenverkopper*: 'soul-seller', the colloquial name for an innkeeper who served sailors so much drink that they passed out; they were then sold to a ship's captain needing a crew.

- 62 *Balle's Catechism*: *Lærebog i den Evangelisk-christelig Religion, indrettet til brug i de danske Skoler* (Textbook of the Evangelical-Christian Religion, designed for use in Danish schools), by Nicolai Edinger Balle (1791). Kierkegaard read *Balle's Catechism* as a child; it made a lasting impression on him.

*Per Degn*: an earthy character in the comedy *Erasmus Montanus* by the Danish playwright Ludvig Holberg (1684–1754), who puts Latin scholars to shame.

- 64 *Philoctetes*: the central character of the tragedy of that title by Sophocles (performed 409 BC). Bitten by a snake while on the way to attack Troy, Philoctetes is abandoned on an island by the rest of the Greek army, who were unable to endure the stench of his wound. Philoctetes' agonized lamentations are prominent in the play.

- 65 *his neighbour*: Job 16: 21.

- 66 *Eliphas . . . Elihu*: the first three are his neighbours who argue with Job, pressing his putative guilt, since otherwise he would not be suffering (Elihu arrives later in the book, and shows a somewhat different attitude).

*pity on me*: Job 19: 221.

- 67 *with lies*: Job: 13: 4.  
*does the wild ass . . . grass*: Job 6: 5.  
*The Lord gave the Lord*: Job 1: 21.
- 69 *days of his youth*: Job 29: 4.  
*earring of gold*: Job 42: 11.  
*had before*: Job 42: 10.
- 72 *marriage*: the Danish term for 'married': *gift*, also means 'poison'.
- 74 *off the street*: Luke 10: 29–37.
- 75 *Ilithyia*: the Greek goddess of childbirth.
- 76 *Clemens Alexandrinus*: Clement of Alexandria, c.AD 200, was one of the first thinkers to blend biblical thinking with Greek philosophy.
- 77 1. 2. 3. *development*: a Hegelian 'development' of ideas was taken as a three-step dialectic, an idea or claim countered by its opposite, and that conflict resolved by a mediating or reconciling step.
- 79 *see only darkly in him*: cf. 'we see through a glass darkly', 1 Corinthians 13: 12.
- 81 *fear and trembling . . . something strange*: Constantine here describes the condition of *Fear and Trembling*'s 'Knight of Faith'.